

Sight & Sound

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE



July 11

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CANNES 2011

TERRENCE MALICK'S 'THE TREE OF LIFE'

AND OTHER TRIUMPHS FROM
PEDRO ALMODOVAR,
AKI KAURISMAKI,
THE DARDENNE BROTHERS,
LYNNE RAMSAY,
NURI BILGE CEYLAN,
LARS VON TRIER,
PAOLO SORRENTINO
AND MANY OTHERS

PLUS

François Ozon's 1970s
farce 'Potiche'

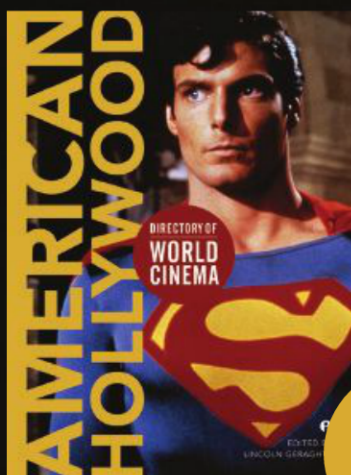
Ivan Passer's classic
'Cutter's Way'

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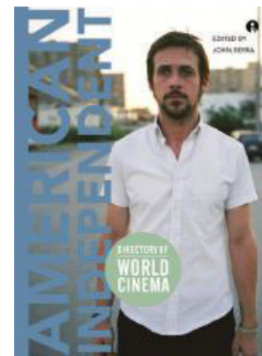
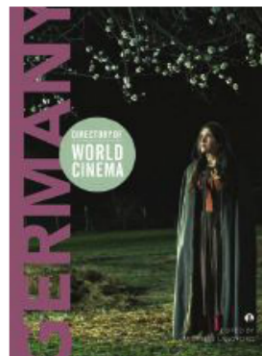
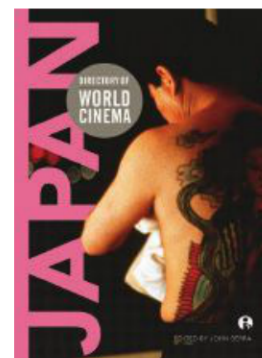
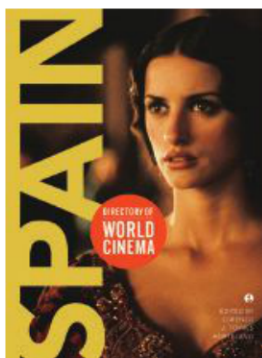
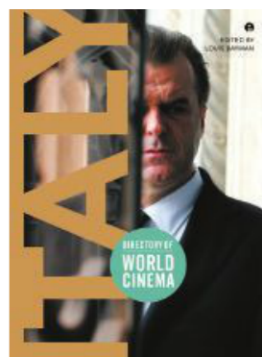
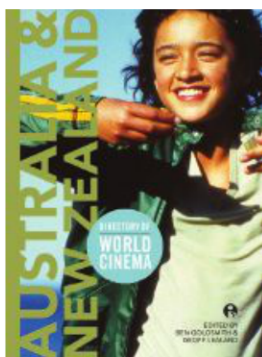


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COVER

Still from 'The Tree of Life'
Image manipulation by
Etienne Gilfillan

Next issue
on sale
5 July

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Welcome. Terrence Malick, the subject of this month's cover feature (p.18), may have won the Palme d'Or with *The Tree of Life*, but as ever it was Lars von Trier (left) who grabbed the column inches at Cannes, less with his intriguing new film *Melancholia* (p.27) than with his Nazi 'gaffe'/ publicity stunt. It's over a decade since the Dane won his own Palme with *Dancer in the Dark*, a film that had the temerity to cast Catherine Deneuve as a factory worker; this month, the queen of French cinema is on the other side of the picket lines in *Potiche* (far left and p.40), François Ozon's joyously kitsch tale of sexual politics in 1970s France. Staying in that era, we take in the flowering of Spanish cinema after the death of Franco (p.34), the lost universe of Soviet sci-fi (p.44) and the last blast of American New Wave cinema, *Cutter's Way* (p.50). All that, plus an Iranian divorce (p.38) and the full Cannes round-up (p.24). **♥ Nick James**

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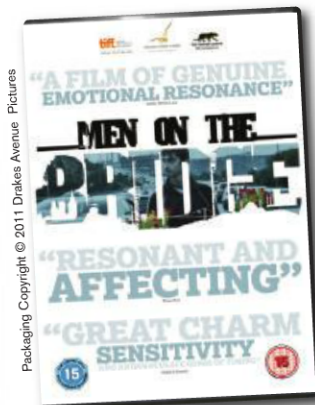
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NICK JAMES

THE FUTURE'S BACK



At a lunch at the Canadian embassy during the London Film Festival a few years back, I found myself sitting next to Chris Smith, the former secretary of state for Culture, Media and Sport (1997-2001). After some pleasant opening chit-chat, he asked me what was, at the time, the million-dollar question. "So Nick," he said, "Did I do the right thing by setting up the UK Film Council?" I was taken aback that he wanted to know my opinion (or at least thought it an interesting way to be polite). My answer, after a few moments dabbling at the wine splatter on my shirt, was: "Yes and no." I said yes (if memory serves me correctly) because it meant we had a government that was taking film seriously, and

no because the move had left the BFI, a cultural body, a servant to a UKFC whose priorities (then) were primarily commercial.

Fast forward to today, and that world has been turned upside down. The BFI has absorbed the rump of the UKFC after the latter's summary disbandment in July 2010 by the coalition government. Last summer, with the BFI and UKFC then locked in a difficult merger dance, everyone felt shell-shocked by the absoluteness of the move – even though it resolved the BFI's position at a single stroke. Whatever the virtues and flaws of both organisations, it seemed a huge risk to dismantle the superstructure of how films were supported and made, at a time when British films were enjoying a high level of production and unparalleled international success.

When the worldwide reaction kicked in, with complaints from the likes of Clint Eastwood and Steven Spielberg, it was made clear by Ed Vaizey, the minister for Creative Industries, that there would be a UK film policy review. In the meantime, a number of factors – the acceptance by the two organisations of merger-by-default with the formation of a new, more influential BFI; the huge financial and Oscar success of the UKFC-backed film *The King's Speech*; and the prospect of lottery monies diverted to the Olympics in recent years returning annual funds for film to the level of around £43 million – have helped engender a more positive outlook.

It is in this context that the same Chris Smith has been asked to chair the new review, presumably on the basis that no one would know better the flaws the UKFC idea turned out to have than its original political sponsor. My opening anecdote illustrates, I think, how keen an interest Smith has continued to take in the fate of film in this country. It makes sense, too, that he should have writer-director Julian Fellowes on the panel – since *Gosford Park* (2001) was the first big success of the original Film Council, as it was then known – alongside three BFI governors and other knowledgeable industry figures. What's worth considering here is the shape the review's agenda should take – and what lessons might be learned from the decade since the Film Council was first formed.

Let's deal first with what's changed in the space of those ten years. A brief scan of UK film releases in 2010 shows that the quantity of UK-based films has vastly increased, even if plenty of them are undistinguished and/or made on scant resources.

It might be adduced that one obvious weakness in the original FC concept of a "sustainable UK film industry" was always that the US industrial model it envied worked on a mud-against-the-wall principle, which was then hard for the UK to mimic. Perhaps digital technology allows that principle to obtain now in the UK (and it would seem that this new level of production has been achieved without the massive seed funding of franchises run by familiar industry figures that was New Labour's first idea).

But there are more radical changes for the panel to consider. One potentially destabilising possibility is the proposal by Fox, Sony, Universal and Warners that they might beam new films directly into people's HD televisions just 60 days after their release (an idea forcefully resisted by the Hollywood filmmaking community); another is that all the US studios seem to be in the process of enforcing a transfer to digital-only projection. Both of these moves are attacks on existing exhibition networks worldwide (many of them in countries that can't afford a mass switch from analogue projection to digital).

I sketch this broader field of consideration because it may present a golden opportunity for

The panel might consider how British cinema can thrive not in imitation of Hollywood, but where Hollywood has abandoned the playing field

UK film. Broadly speaking, one can argue that prestige British-based films like *The King's Speech* (and *Gosford Park*, *The Young Victoria*, *Brighton Rock* et al) take up a middle-market position that Hollywood production has largely abandoned. But in fact, a close look at UK production output could justify the claim that there is currently no more varied cinema in the world. In particular, what was missing from the early Film Council years – a UK auteur cinema – is now abundant. Venice festival programmer Marco Müller recently said he was very impressed by recent British films, and new works by Andrea Arnold, Terence Davies and Steve McQueen are likely to have a strong presence at festivals this year (as Lynne Ramsay has already had in Cannes with *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, see p.26). What the panel might best consider, then, is how British cinema can thrive not in imitation of Hollywood, but where Hollywood has abandoned the playing field.



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IN CINEMAS JULY 8

THE BIGGER PICTURE



Birth of anime

On its first release in 1988, Otomo Katsuhiro's 'Akira' became a landmark. A huge success in Japan, it was also the film that introduced Japanese anime to the West. The complex story takes place in 2019 in 'Neo-Tokyo', a dystopian 'Blade Runner'-like city built after the destruction of Tokyo by a nuclear bomb in 1988.

Ruled by the military, Neo-Tokyo has been overrun by cyberpunk bikers, among them Kaneda (above) and Tetsuo, who uncover a secret government experiment to develop telekinetic humans, and become the focus of a battle between the city's different groups – and the creature 'Akira'. Otomo's vision has influenced films far

beyond anime, among them 'The Matrix', so it was fitting when Keanu Reeves was reported to be attached to a live-action remake. Reeves has now passed, leaving the project in doubt, but UK audiences can see Otomo's original on the big screen once again when it's rereleased on 17 June, alongside a new Blu-ray edition.

Woman in a man's world

Dylan Cave sees a new version of 1972's *'Pope Joan'* reinvent its controversial subject

All film archivists are aware of the malleable nature of movies. Spliced prints, fading colour, rereleases, subtitles, overdubbing and restoration all help to alter the shape, sound and feel of a film as it travels and ages. Producers and distributors have always revisited and repackaged their back catalogues, whether adding soundtracks to silent films, squeezing Cinemascope into 4:3 television sets or chopping scenes to please the censor of a new territory. Deleted scenes, alternative stories and extended versions are now added to films that have barely had time to embed in audience's memories, while the 'director's cut' reshapes familiar favourites into new versions. It's an undoubted pleasure of the digital age, but it also creates a headache for the film curator swamped in a multitude of versions. Is the 'original' version of a film the first release or the later release that represents the film as it was originally intended?

Such questions inform the recent reversioning of the British costume drama *Pope Joan*. Originally released in 1972, it starred Liv Ullmann as the legendary woman who supposedly headed the Roman Catholic Church for two years in the 850s. Co-starring Franco Nero and Maximilian Schell as Joan's love interest, and featuring cameos from Olivia de Havilland and a scene-stealing Trevor Howard, it was a typically well-made historical biopic, albeit one whose 'bio' was based on conjecture. Michael Anderson, the stalwart director of *The Dam Busters* (1955) and *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1956), worked from a script by John Briley, a former historian who would later go on to win an Oscar for *Gandhi* (1982). Maurice Jarre composed the score and Billy Williams, fresh from *Women in Love* (1969), was the cinematographer.

Yet despite the talent on display, the film met with harsh criticism. Veering between snooty indifference and acerbic vitriol, the reviews combined a sense of costume-drama fatigue with plain dislike of the film's conventional treatment of sensational events. Although *Pope Joan* openly depicted monks with concubines, nuns attracting lovers and a pontiff going into labour, the film countered its sensational elements with an emphasis on historical context – which somehow affronted those seeking outrage.



Through the looking glass of 1970s counterculture, this version increases the potency of Pope Joan's legend

A press release stating that the script was acceptable to Vatican officials did little to appease the naysayers. The film subsequently suffered hacking at the hands of its distributor, who cut it from 132 minutes down to 111 and, in the US, changed the title to *The Devil's Imposter*.

The excised footage consisted mainly of a modern story that Briley had written to run alongside the historical drama. In this contemporary tale, Liv Ullmann plays a naive 1970s evangelist, caught in a tawdry love triangle and starting to believe she is a reincarnation of Pope Joan. Entire sequences were filmed in 1971 with Keir Dullea and Robert Beatty as psychiatrists trying to diagnose Ullmann's delusional preacher but, outside the 1972 press screenings, they have remained unseen – until 2009, when Briley, Anderson and producer Kurt Unger decided to reinsert them to create a new cut of the film under the title *She... Who Would Be Pope*.

The final edit, though a bit bumpy due to the 40-year-old footage, is an unexpected take on religious sanctity and human sexuality. It's a surprising swansong for the careers of both Anderson and Briley, not least because *She... Who Would Be Pope* amounts to a reimagining of the film rather than a longer cut. Running at 111 minutes – the same length as the release print of *Pope Joan*

– the new version blends, replaces and reframes the original footage. Gone are extended scenes of Joan's approbation as Pope, in favour of a cynical glance at flower-power licentiousness.

The effect of all this is to shift the focus of the film. With the contemporary storyline, the filmmakers presumably intended to provide a bridge for audiences to relate to Pope Joan's story, but through its purposeful elisions and bizarre melange of historical and contemporary scenes, *She... Who Would Be Pope* manages to create something else. It's less concerned with convincing us of the legend's truth, and more with illustrating the psychological impact of her story.

The Vatican has long denied Pope Joan's existence but, through the cynical looking glass of 1970s counterculture, this new version increases the potency of the legend, showing how it resonates with attitudes towards sex and religion. Whether we regard it as restoration, rerelease or director's cut, *She... Who Would Be Pope*'s new interpretation of its old subject matter perfectly reveals the possibilities presented by cinema's malleability.

■ *'She... Who Would Be Pope'* screens on 22 June at BFI Southbank, London, followed by a Q&A with screenwriter John Briley

● **Miguel Gomes**, the Portuguese director of the acclaimed 'Our Beloved Month of August' (released on DVD later this summer by Second Run) is currently shooting his next feature, 'Tabu', in Mozambique.

The story follows an old woman, her Cape Verdean maid and a neighbour, who all live in a Lisbon apartment building. When the old lady dies, the other two learn of an episode from her past, described in the production notes as "a tale of love and crime set in an Africa straight from the world of adventure films".

● **Quentin Tarantino** is to return with 'Django Unchained', a spaghetti western about a freed slave who, under the tutelage of a German bounty hunter, searches Southern plantations for the wife he was separated from at the auction blocks. Christoph Waltz has been confirmed to play the bounty hunter, while Will Smith is rumoured to be considering breaking out of his comfort zone to play the freed slave.

● **Jim Jarmusch** follows 2009's 'The Limits of Control' with what the director describes as a "crypto-vampire love story", set in Detroit and Tangier. Tilda Swinton, Michael Fassbender and Mia Wasikowska are set to star in the as-yet-untitled film.

● **Lisa Cholodenko** looks set to follow her Oscar-nominated success 'The Kids Are All Right' with a live-action adaptation of Judith Viorst's classic 1972 children's book 'Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day'. The story revolves around a family whose members are all enduring the worst day of their lives.

● **Lars von Trier** (pictured below) has reportedly convinced Martin Scorsese to work with him on an 'obstructions' project, in a similar fashion to the Danish director's 2003 film 'The Five Obstructions', in which Jørgen Leth remade his short film 'The Perfect Human' five times, each time adhering to a different strict condition contrived by von Trier. There's no confirmation yet as to which of his films Scorsese will remake. Before that, Scorsese is set to shoot his long-awaited feature 'Silence' in early 2012, with Daniel Day-Lewis starring.



Korea opportunities

James Bell reports on this year's Digital Project, and other Jeonju highlights

The best story from this year's Jeonju Film Festival involves Claire Denis, Hong Sangsoo, and – unsurprisingly, for anyone familiar with Hong's films – a night on the tiles. Denis – who's on record as an admirer of Hong's work, having written a breathless appreciation in *Cahiers du cinéma* – reportedly got off the plane in Seoul and went straight to a bar to meet the South Korean director, proceeded to drink all night, then stumbled bleary-eyed to her press conference the following morning. Here's hoping the incident turns up in Hong's next film.

Denis had come to Jeonju – a university town four hours' drive south of Seoul, which hosts a festival that over the past 12 years has earned international renown as a bastion of challenging new cinema from Korea and across the world, as well as programmes of unheralded directors and national cinemas – because she'd contributed a short film to this year's Digital Project. More than any other factor, the project has been key to Jeonju's ability to punch above its weight. Each year the festival commissions shorts from three directors, awarding them each 50 million won (roughly £28,000), on



Casting the Maroons: Claire Denis's short 'Aller au diable' premiered at Jeonju

condition that they shoot on digital. The list of previous contributors is remarkable, including Hong Sangsoo himself, Pedro Costa, Bong Joon-ho and Apichatpong Weerasethakul.

This year's project brought Denis together with Jean-Marie Straub and José-Luis Guerín. Denis's own entry, *Aller au diable* (*To the Devil*), was something of a disappointment. It follows her journey to the border of Suriname and French Guyana to meet Jean Bena, self-proclaimed leader of the local Maroon population – descendants of African slaves brought over by Dutch colonialists. Bena has a reputation as a

charismatic rebel, but his name has also been linked with crimes from smuggling to murder. Denis admitted to having made the film in haste – which shows in its comparative formlessness. It feels more like a rough document of a recce than a film to stand on its own merits, though it's at least interesting to follow her research.

Straub's entry *Un héritier* (*An Heir*) was the shortest of the three; obscure on a first, jet-lagged viewing, it compelled more on a second. Made as an addendum to Straub/Huillet's 1994 film *Lothringen!*, it consists simply of a young man reciting passages from

a 1903 novel by Maurice Barrès, which tell of the particular dislocated anxieties of the French-speaking aristocracy in Alsace.

But it was José-Luis Guerín's entry *Recuerdos de una mañana* (*Memories of a Morning*) that was almost unanimously considered the strongest. Real care and attention has gone into this touching story, in which Guerín pieces together the memories the residents in his Barcelona apartment block have of a neighbour who was known to all for playing the violin on his balcony – off which he one day jumped, committing suicide. In bringing together the various characters who live on different sides of this street corner, the film speaks volumes about the simultaneous physical closeness and emotional distance that come with living in a city.

Jeonju also hosts a competition for independent Korean cinema, but the mostly mediocre films on show this year suggest a lack of urgent new voices. But one Korean film that did impress was Kim Kyung-man's *Miguui Baramgwa Bul* (*An Escalator in World Order*), which recalls *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceausescu* in its layering of archive footage to chart an aspect of national history – in this case the often alarming political and cultural convergence between Korea and the US since the Korean War.

THE NUMBERS

Cinematic street smarts

Joe Cornish's urban-set debut 'Attack the Block' risked pigeonholing but reached beyond it, says Charles Gant

Any film presents both challenges and opportunities to a distributor, and none more so than Joe Cornish's 'aliens vs hoodies' picture *Attack the Block*. On the challenge side, the five lead actors are unknowns, while the film's 15 certificate meant that it would need to attract an audience older than its main characters. As for opportunities, it was from the producers of *Shaun of the Dead* and *Hot Fuzz*; director Joe Cornish, although unproven, benefited from a degree of affection as a TV personality; and the genre-splicing premise had potential broad appeal.

One factor that could have played either way was the film's relationship

to the urban audience that has delivered big profits for films such as *Adulthood* and *Anuvahood*, with the teens in *Attack the Block* sharing the vogue slang of those hoodie hits. However, UK distributor Optimum was wary of ghettoising it. Marketing boss Hugh Spearing explains: "We wanted to make sure we got that urban audience to see the film, but we also wanted to make sure it seemed broadly accessible – that it didn't look like just a hoodie movie."

The solution, says Spearing, was a multi-pronged approach, with four distinct television spots: "One focused on the kids for younger channels, one on the adults for more mainstream channels. We did a horror spot for horror and sci-fi channels, and a quotes spot trumpeting our critical endorsement." Such a strategy has its risks, since the messages will inevitably bleed across beyond their

targets, as Spearing notes: "We had to ensure that none of the spots would alienate any of the other audiences we were targeting."

Films with youthful protagonists can play successfully to adults, as the takings of *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Billy Elliot* attest, but many have stumbled, among them *Purely Belter* and Danny Boyle's *Millions*. Optimum has form in this arena with *Son of Rambow*, which successfully targeted both families and the 1980s nostalgia audience, taking £4.2 million. Recent indie picture *Submarine*, from Richard Ayoade, played to adults plus some older teens, reaching £1.4 million.

Attack the Block opened with a respectable £1.13 million including paid previews, and after 12 days has reached £1.92 million. Comparisons with *Anuvahood* are instructive. Like the Adam Deacon hoodie comedy, Cornish's film underperformed in

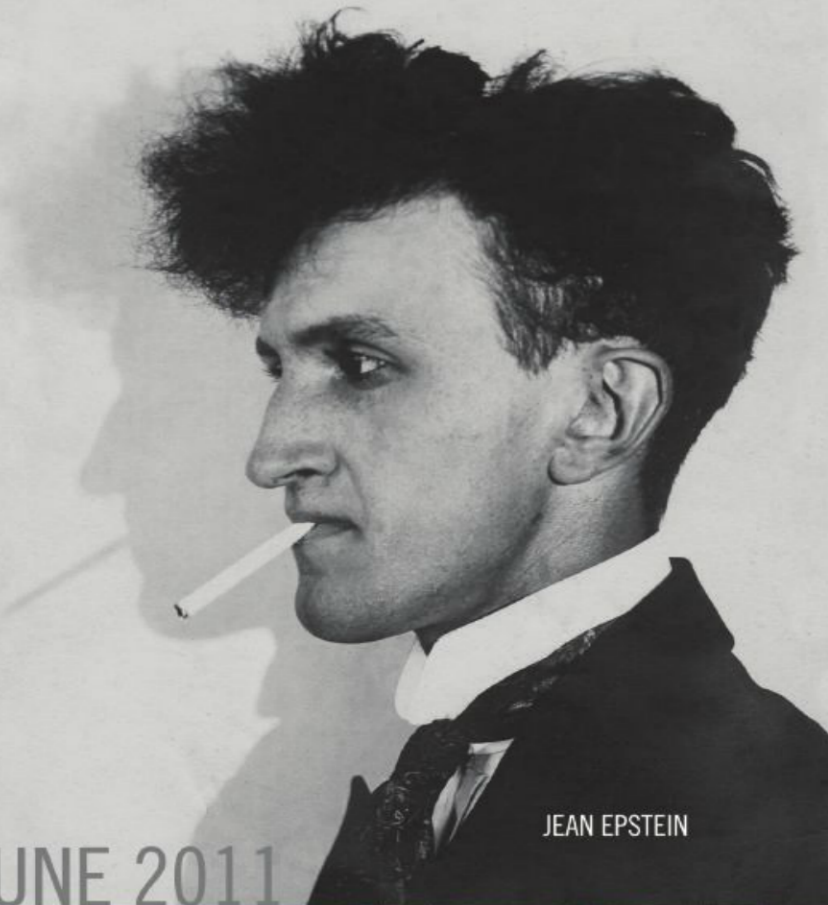
British urban youth films at UK box office

Film	Year	Gross
Harry Brown	2009	£4,557,934
Adulthood	2008	£3,348,834
Anuvahood	2011	£2,112,964
Attack the Block	2011	£1,924,681*
Shank	2009	£550,274
Kidulthood	2006	£502,346

* Gross after 12 days

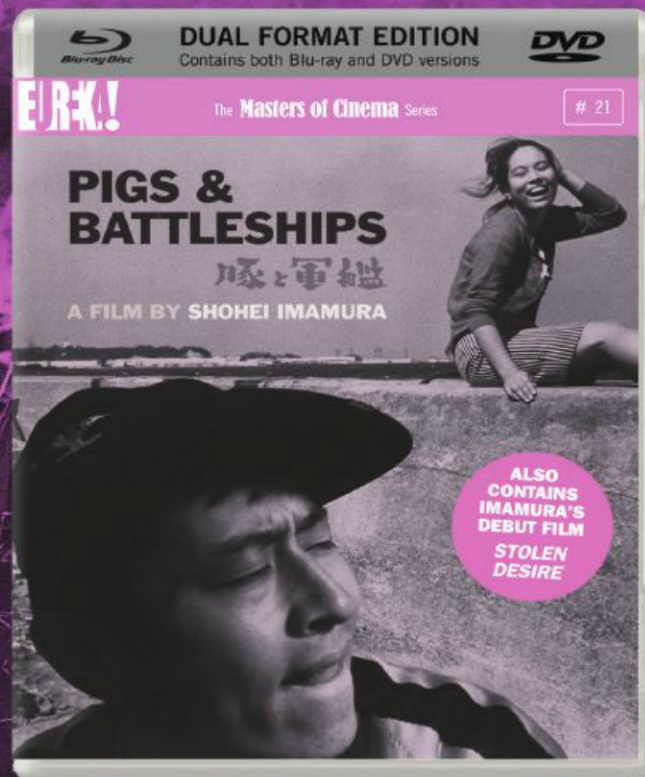
Ireland and Scotland and thrived in London. But the skew towards the capital was not nearly so severe on this occasion, and four of its ten highest-grossing sites were outside London, as against just one for *Anuvahood*. While Deacon's picture scored in the racially and economically mixed London suburbs of Acton, Croydon and Enfield, *Attack the Block*'s top location was a long way from the South London tower blocks depicted in the movie: the Vue Islington, in London's fashionable N1.

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The play's the thing

Following the unearthing of a cache of British TV plays in the US, John Wyver rediscovers a lost world of 1950s and 60s studio drama

Television's past is another country. They do things differently there. To watch small-screen drama from 50 years ago today is an experience comparable to what it must have been like, during the years just after World War II, to view the earliest moving images from the turn of the century. We have had to learn again how to look at films made before the 'classical style', that were once called 'primitive'; something similar is asked of us by studio drama from the 1950s and 60s. It's television, Jim, but not as we know it.

That TV plays and series can be immensely rewarding and revealing five decades on is demonstrated by the British dramas recently revealed as uniquely preserved in the Library of Congress collections in Washington DC. Diligent and imaginative archival research has turned up more than 100 hours of recordings that had been wiped or junked by the BBC and the ITV companies that produced them, and were believed lost forever.

Titles available for viewing once again include classic plays by Jean Anouilh (*Antigone*, 1959, with Dorothy Tutin and David McCallum; *Colombe*, 1960, also with Tutin and Sean Connery), Chekhov (*The Seagull*, 1966), Jean Cocteau (*The Typewriter*, 1962, with Jeremy Brett playing sinister twins) and Ibsen (*The Wild Duck*, 1957; Peggy Ashcroft in *Rosmerholm*, 1965).

Similarly brought back from archival oblivion is a cluster of Shakespeares, including productions for schools of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Twelfth Night* and *Hamlet*. There are popular series too, like *Paris 1900*, produced by Granada in 1964 and based on the farces of Georges Feydeau, and the BBC's *Thirteen Against Fate* (1966), adapted from Georges Simenon's short stories. There are even a couple of productions from the contemporary drama strand *The Wednesday Play*, one of which – Alan Seymour's *Auto Stop* (1965) – has a young (and rather brilliant) David Hemmings hitchhiking across Europe and back, all without leaving the TV studio.

A few selected titles, including *The Typewriter*, are being screened this month at BFI Southbank; others will be available in the BFI Mediatheque, including *The Wild Duck* and *Antigone*,



Centre stage: Leonard Rossiter in 'Doctor Knock', one of the rediscovered performances

a production of Noel Coward's *Fallen Angels*, and a radical 1962 version of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, with Robert Shaw and Patrick Macnee.

That we can see these riches once again in Britain is all thanks to the researcher Sam Serafy. Looking through the Library of Congress archive in 2007, he turned up a number of Shakespeare titles from British TV that, according to records this side of the pond, were 'missing believed wiped'. This prompted him to delve deeper into the archive's collection of recordings from National Educational Television, a US producer and distributor that predated the creation of the Public Broadcasting Service in 1970.

In the years before PBS, NET purchased programming for educational channels in the US, importing recordings from the BBC as well as from ITV's Associated-Rediffusion, Granada and Southern. Copies of the programmes in question had been sent to NET and then in many cases the originals had been dumped to save shelf space or wiped so that expensive videotape masters could be reused. Television in those years had little regard for much

The originals had been wiped so that expensive videotape masters could be reused

of what was seen as essentially disposable programming.

In prospect, almost every one of the discoveries is enticing, but actually encountering the monochrome, 405-line, studio-confined and invariably slow-paced recordings is, let's say, complex. These plays were recorded live or 'as live', with four or five studio cameras. Such productions these days are as rare as Ibsen farces, although Sky Arts has honourably attempted to revive the tradition with its modest series *Theatre Live!* (2009) and *Chekhov: Comedy Shorts* (2010).

We have lost a sense of how to watch studio drama. Accustomed to the fluid cinematic energies of today's TV, our critical faculties require recalibration as we approach, say, the 90-minute 1966 version of Jules Romain's period satire *Doctor Knock*. Apart from some unconvincing film shots of a vintage car on a country road, the three distinct acts of the drama are set in a bar, a consulting room and finally the reception area of a hotel. Yet such a production deserves far more than a dismissal as 'theatrical'. As two rural doctors, John Le Mesurier and Leonard Rossiter give consummate performances, which can be appreciated all the better as the cameras favour tight close-ups – Rossiter in particular has an intensity that towards the close teeters on manic despotism. The staging, too, is achieved with exquisite skill by director Herbert Wise, combining precisely balanced multi-figure compositions with rigorously

motivated sweeping camera moves. There are pleasures aplenty here, if we can adjust our preconceptions.

When the Library of Congress find was first announced, Mark Lawson suggested in *The Guardian* that "these plays belong more to the history of the stage than to that of TV". But such a comment fails to recognise how fundamental studio drama was to broadcasting for more than five decades. It also sees theatre and TV as separate media, whereas it can be far more productive to explore the connections and relationships between them, as well as their intertwinings with cinema and literature.

One of the most fascinating of the Library of Congress titles is the 1967 BBC adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing*. The cast is one to be cherished, with a youthful Maggie Smith as Beatrice sparring with her then husband Robert Stephens (they married the year the production was recorded, and divorced in 1974) – and one 'Mike' Gambon towards the bottom of the credits in a tiny part.

The original of this production was directed by Franco Zeffirelli at the National Theatre's pre-South Bank home of the Old Vic, where it opened in February 1965. It had been Kenneth Tynan's idea to ask Zeffirelli to take on the play, and the critic – who was also the NT's literary manager – approached Robert Graves to revise the text. "What we want," Tynan asked the celebrated poet, "is to sweep away the dry cobwebs of text so that full understanding of the words isn't confined to academics." The TV recording reveals a great deal, not only about the major figures associated with it, but also about the relationships between stage and screen, writing and playing, the bold strokes of theatre and the intimacy of television.

Lest we forget in the understandable excitement about the Library of Congress titles, there are still – for all the broadcasters' thoughtless destruction – hundreds of comparable recordings in the BBC vaults, the BFI National Archive and elsewhere. The vast majority of the new finds – including *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Doctor Knock* – have hardly been seen since their first transmission, and are certainly yet to receive any contemporary critical attention. If television's past is indeed another country, there are swathes of territory awaiting exploration.

■ 'Missing Believed Wiped Special: UnLOCKed The Library of Congress Discoveries' plays until 29 June at BFI Southbank, London; further titles can be viewed at the BFI Mediatheque

Brothers in arms

Once arthouse darlings, the Taviani brothers are now shunned by UK distributors.

Michael Brooke resurrects their 1974 film *'Allonsanfan'*

Alphabetical proximity aside, there was little that obviously linked Quentin Tarantino with the brothers Paolo and Vittorio Taviani until an unexpected memory jog at the very end of *Inglourious Basterds*. I'd only seen their 1974 film *Allonsanfan* once, probably in the late 1980s, but although my visual memory of it had dimmed to a few images of a scruffily bearded Marcello Mastroianni and a gigantic toad framed by a doorway, I recognised Ennio Morricone's main theme immediately.

Widely anthologised on Euro-soundtrack compilations as *'Rabbia e tarantella'*, it's a *crecendo perpetuo* that constantly feels as if it's about to erupt into a magnificent main theme, though even the strident brass interruption at the end offers no more than yet another variation on the original riff. It's a perfect accompaniment for a picaresque yarn about ineffectual insurrectionists in 1816, just after the Napoleonic yoke was lifted from Italy, but decades before the country's unification.

The Tavianis have been so comprehensively blanked by British distributors since 1994 (when *Fiorile* opened belatedly to an indifferent reception) that it's startling to recall how high their profile was after the Palme d'Or-winning *Padre Padrone* (1977) first put them on the international map. With all their films from those years getting some UK exposure, mostly on the big screen (though 1979's *Il prato/The Meadow* went straight to television), they had a better track record than Fellini, never mind their immediate contemporaries. But despite their 15-year run as arthouse darlings, this period only represents the middle act of their career; the five films apiece from the pre-1977 and post-1993 periods have remained almost entirely invisible for UK audiences.

The exception was *Allonsanfan*, which was given a belated UK release in 1978, but largely shunned by the repertory-cinema programmers who preferred the brothers' more immediately accessible later efforts *The Night of San Lorenzo* (*La notte di San Lorenzo*, 1982) and *Kaos* (1984). Aside from a long-deleted American VHS release with reputedly dreadful subtitles, *Allonsanfan* doesn't seem to have been released on any English-friendly video format, and while my



Cloak and dagger: Marcello Mastroianni as a 19th-century revolutionary in *'Allonsanfan'*

imported Surf Video DVD has an excellent transfer, it's entirely in Italian. The same linguistic restrictions apply to other Italian DVDs of the Tavianis' early works, but since those films were never released in the UK at all, the opportunity to catch up with them in any form was gratefully seized.

Watching *I sovversi* (*The Subversives*, 1967), *San Michele aveva un gallo* (*Saint Michael Had a Rooster*, 1971) and *Allonsanfan* back to back, it became clear that the Tavianis' main preoccupation in those early years was the political disillusionment running deeply through Italian society at the time – *I sovversi* even uses the 1964 funeral of Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti as the starting point for a multi-faceted exploration of where the Left potentially went astray. *San Michele*, meanwhile, is a direct precursor to *Allonsanfan*: set in the 1870s, it follows anarchist internationalist Guido Maneri (Giulio Brogi) as he attempts to turn an Umbrian village into a test bed for his ideas – without much success.

Mastroianni is perfectly cast as a man of Hamlet-like hesitancy

Allonsanfan's protagonist Fulvio Imbriani (Marcello Mastroianni) has the opposite problem. A former aristocrat, he has no shortage of influence or support, thanks to his prominent membership of the underground sect known as the 'Sublime Brothers'; but his own incarceration has left him thoroughly disillusioned with revolutionary ideals, and determined to start afresh. Self-disgust, however, prevents him from admitting this change of heart even to his former comrades, compelling him to try to undermine their plans without betraying himself – a mission whose ultimately abject failure comes as little surprise.

Allonsanfan is a much richer film than a simplistic political reading permits. Mastroianni could hardly

be more perfectly cast as Fulvio, a man whose every action is marked by a Hamlet-like hesitancy, deriving at least as much from intellectual indecision as from physical cowardice. His tragedy is that, although he repudiates the Sublime Brothers' methods and ideology, he does so not from a reactionary perspective but from an impossibly idealistic one: like Guido Maneri, he's a dreamer, not a doer. Accordingly, *Allonsanfan* lays Fulvio's psyche bare in a way that verges on magic realism. The aforementioned toad makes an unexpectedly literal appearance after Fulvio tries to scare his son with a night-time horror story, while a dinner-party game in which representative colours are assigned to his relatives is accompanied by Fulvio repainting them in his mind's eye.

Visually, the Tavianis' treatment is as distinctive as a signature: a series of deceptively simple, static compositions in which timeless landscape and architecture implicitly mock the ephemeral human conflict being played out in the foreground. Giuseppe Ruzzolini's cinematography and Giovanni Sbarra's production design are immaculate, with Lina Nerli Taviani's costumes standing out for their conceptual wit as well as their vivid use of colour. The way the Sublime Brothers segue from pointy-hooded KKK lookalikes to nattily red-jacketed insurrectionists creates an effect both absurd and deadly serious – a description that also applies to the film's very title. The nickname of the son of the Sublime Brothers' now-dead founder, 'Allonsanfan' is derived from "*allons enfants*", the first two words of the 'Marseillaise', here infantilised by the removal of the original context. Talking of music, Morricone's deliciously inventive score is frequently woven into the action, most memorably in the scene in which Fulvio's sister Esther (Laura Betti) turns a half-remembered ditty into a full-blown song-and-dance number, or when Fulvio himself borrows a violin in a restaurant to impress his son.

Above all, this wittily rumbustious, almost operatic film offers a stirring reminder of a time when European filmmakers regularly engaged with serious political ideas, without compromising their cinematic creativity. Parts of *Allonsanfan*, especially the long-shot insurrections themselves, recall the work of Miklós Jancsó, who was ignored in Britain for even longer than the Tavianis, but has recently enjoyed a mini-revival. Is it too much to hope that the Tavianis will get a similar second chance?

What the papers said



and stylistic rhetoric, posited somewhere between 19th-century melodrama and popular opera. *'Allonsanfan'*... aligns itself with

other Italian films like Leone's *'Once upon a Time in the West'* and Bertolucci's *'The Spider's Stratagem'* as a paean to cinema as a revolutionary medium, a medium which can make rhetorical use of material from earlier films, literature or opera, but revitalise it in the transcription. The result may be somewhat muted politically, but it's aesthetically thrilling."

Tony Rayns, 'MFB', August 1978

Beautiful friendships

Two very different characters, thrown together by coincidence, only to find they have more in common than they thought: it's the archetypal 'buddy-movie' set-up, and this month MGM HD's 'The Director's Chair' season shines the spotlight on some stand-out examples. In Stanley Kramer's heartfelt plea for better race

relations in a fractured US, *The Defiant Ones* (Mon 11 July, 9pm), Tony Curtis and Sidney Poitier play escaped convicts who are grudgingly chained together but, through adversity, discover respect for one another.

Jump forward a decade to John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy* (left, Sat 16 July, 9pm), which – with its unforgettable use of Harry Nilsson's song 'Everybody's Talkin' – struck a rueful chord for the 1960s counterculture, suggesting that for all the optimistic talk of sexual and social liberation, the cold reality was ultimately less forgiving. The film's greatness lies in the performances: Jon Voight as Joe Buck, a Texan hustler adrift in the urban jungle of New York, who finds friendship with Dustin Hoffman's scene-stealing, limping con artist Ratso. Equally touching in its examination of male friendship is *Deer Hunter* director Michael Cimino's overlooked debut *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* (Sun 17 July, 9pm), with Clint Eastwood typically cool as an old-pro bank robber and Jeff Bridges magnetic as his young-buck sidekick – a role that saw him nominated for an Oscar.

The Director's Chair, 11-17 July 2011

'The Defiant Ones' (right), 'Midnight Cowboy' and 'Thunderbolt and Lightfoot' are showing in July as part of 'The Director's Chair' season – a selection of films showcasing the quality and range of directing talent on MGM HD, from the likes of modern maestros Oliver Stone, Brian De Palma and Martin Scorsese to Hollywood legends John Ford, Billy Wilder and John Huston. For more details see www.mgmhd.co.uk

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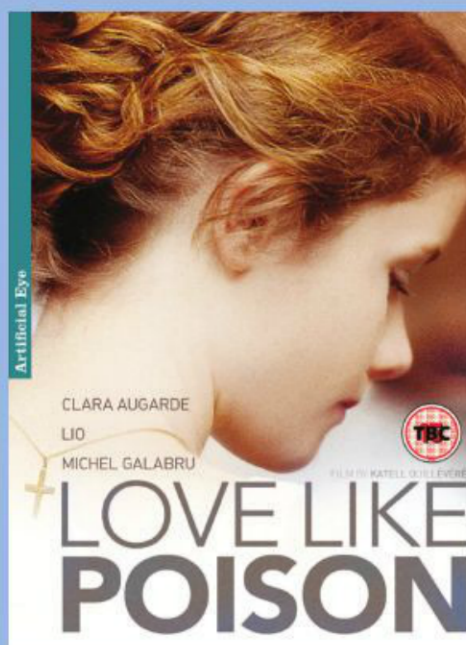
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Angel of speed

James Bell talks to director **Asif Kapadia** about the dramatic allure of Formula One's lost hero, **Ayrton Senna**

For anyone who has seen his previous features – poetic, near-dialogue-free *The Warrior* (2001), forgettable Sarah Michelle Gellar horror-thriller *The Return* (2006) and stark polar drama *Far North* (2007) – British director Asif Kapadia might not seem an obvious choice to make a documentary about Brazilian Formula One driver Ayrton Senna. Yet Kapadia, a lifelong sports fan (if not formerly a Formula One devotee) has crafted the most thrilling sports documentary since *When We Were Kings* (1996), the account of the Ali-Foreman 'Rumble in the Jungle'.

Like Ali, Senna was a sportsman whose brilliant talent and charisma transcended his sport; he has come to embody a universal courageousness and something extraordinary about the limits of human accomplishment, taking on an almost martyr-like role since his tragic death in a race in San Marino in 1994, when he was still at his peak as arguably the finest racing driver of all time. Handsome, charming, a national hero in his homeland, Senna has been the subject of a number of abortive feature-film projects over the years – Oliver Stone, Michael Mann, Walter Salles and Antonio Banderas all tried and failed.

The initial energy behind making *Senna* came from producer James Gay-Rees, who began working on it in 2004. "This is the most collaborative film I've worked on, and the idea really began with the producer," says Kapadia. "I'd just come off a really tough shoot in the Arctic on *Far North*, where it had all been about the location, so the idea of making a movie where I didn't have to go to the other side of the world was appealing. I'd just had a kid too. Making *Senna* was a conscious reaction to *Far North*, where I felt the images had taken over the film. I wanted to do something where it was just story and character – where I didn't have the same control over image.

"All the way through making the film we had incredible luck. James went to Working Title with the idea, and the executive there said, 'You have to meet my husband, Manish Pandey.' Manish [who went on to write

and executive-produce *Senna*] was a surgeon who had never made a film before, but happened to be a huge Senna fan and was looking to get into films. Then I came on board. I'd never been to a race, never read a book on Senna, but I knew enough to know how important he was."

Some of the earlier attempts to make a film of Senna's life failed because they hadn't secured the crucial cooperation of the driver's family, but in this case the family was encouraging. "Largely because of Manish's love and knowledge of Senna, they said yes, which in turn led to Bernie Ecclestone saying yes. Bernie had a fondness for Senna, as nearly everybody did. Positive word about us then spread through the Formula One community, which opened up access to footage."

It was then a further eight months before the project got the green light, during which time Kapadia rented an editing suite in Soho and began to take archive footage off YouTube and off old videos and cut it together. The project was initially set up as a conventional documentary – 40 minutes of archive footage and the rest talking heads or miscellaneous material – but Kapadia became convinced that the way to tell the story was through archive footage alone. "Obviously Kevin Macdonald and James Marsh used talking heads really effectively in *Touching the Void* and *Man on Wire*, and so had *When We Were Kings*, which was a big influence on me," says Kapadia. "But, perhaps because my background is different, instinctively I went against using them. We used some voiceover, but I deliberately never shot interviews, because I knew if I shot them I'd have to use them. It's that Hitchcock thing, if you shoot coverage they'll make you use it – so don't shoot the coverage!"

Kapadia cut early versions of the film using only archive footage and, he says, "One by one, bit by bit, the executives saw that this was the way to make the film. We then had to go back to Bernie and renegotiate the deal to get more footage. I felt like I was seeing the rushes to a film that would work even for people who weren't previously interested in Senna or in Formula One. It was the magnetic charm of Senna himself, his obvious brilliance. Senna did

things that were presumed to be impossible, such as stalling and coming back from 14th on the grid. He would do things like that time and time again. His life was like a movie, and he was a movie star."



'Senna did things that were presumed impossible, time and time again. His life was like a movie, and he was a movie star'

things that were presumed to be impossible, such as stalling and coming back from 14th on the grid. He would do things like that time and time again. His life was like a movie, and he was a movie star."

And then there was the infamous rivalry with Alain Prost, which started the moment Senna came to Formula One in 1984. Senna was the young threat to Prost's reign as champion, but their bitterness only sank in when they became teammates at McLaren. "That rivalry was so vivid in the footage," says Kapadia. "It was a particular period in time when both were constantly followed by cameras and would talk to their audience on the record, but there was no Twitter, no Facebook, no YouTube, so they weren't guarded. Senna could say something to a Brazilian journalist and not worry about it being picked up in France."

Senna was charming, devout and a hero in Brazil, but he had an edge. He would argue the case for other drivers and was often the only one to speak up, but could also be ruthless on the track, as he showed when he crashed into Prost at the Japanese Grand Prix

in 1990 – a year after his rival had crashed into him in the same race. As a Brazilian, Senna was an outsider, coming into a world where the administration seemed to favour the European Prost.

"Formula One is very political," says Kapadia. "What's happening on the track is just the tip of the iceberg – often the really interesting stuff happens behind the scenes, and the track is a boring procession. The arguing that happens off camera is amazing. You couldn't make [French head of Formula One] Jean-Marie Balestre up. The way he ran Formula One, the way he looked in his leather jacket... he was a sinister character."

Part of the challenge for Kapadia was simply deciding what to leave out, as there was such a wealth of footage. Initial edits of the film ran to more than seven hours. "We had lots on Senna's early years in Brazil and on the final fateful race at Imola in San Marino in 1994," Kapadia recalls. "But his life really did have three acts, and that's where Manish as a writer was so crucial. We were writing, directing and editing all at the same time. For me the challenge was



Right on track: Asif Kapadia



always to make it work as a drama. I wanted it to be a true fiction, *In Cold Blood* style.

"The first act: it's easy, he's winning everything, it's fun, and it's only once he's been robbed of his second title by the back-room manoeuvres of Balestre [who denied Senna the 1989 championship on the spurious charge of a technical infringement following the crash with Prost at the Japanese Grand Prix] that he loses his love slightly for the sport. It's at that point that danger creeps in – it's the start of the fall. We then introduce the doctor, Sid Watkins, who becomes Senna's friend, and is a character in the film up to the tragedy at the end. So it was written like you would write a fictional story, with scenes and narrative threads like a drama."

Something else Kapadia had to bear in mind was the highly variable quality of the source material. "I like the way the look of the footage changes through the film," he explains. "One of the reasons I prefer film to digital is because of its imperfections. Ironically, the imperfections actually make it more real, whereas if it were shot on film today, those imperfections would all be cleaned up digitally. We've got everything from super 8 to one-inch and U-matic – these old video formats that don't exist any more."

"My favourite scene is the Brazilian Grand Prix in 1991, where Senna wins for the first time in front of his home crowd, despite his gearbox having broken six laps before the end, so he has to drive only in sixth gear. The footage is very poor quality – the in-car camera is a tiny thing sending an image over a couple of miles, it was pouring with rain, the sky's gone black – but it's still visceral and powerful. If nothing else, it's real, and you can't reshoot that. The emotion that comes through from the real footage counterbalances any technical limitations."

Formula One was a much more dangerous sport in those days, as is borne out by the footage. "Senna's death changed things," says Kapadia. "Now you have 20-foot fences around the track, and you really can't tell where you are in the world at any given race, but back then it was really like they were driving on the streets – you could see shop fronts. Even though they're actually going faster today, it still looks as if the drivers were going faster then. Today the in-car cameras are placed slightly higher in the car; then they were closer to the road, giving this sensation of incredible speed."

Going through the footage, Kapadia found it eerie how many clues there were to the circumstances of Senna's death. "Scenes of him standing on the Tamburello corner in San Marino saying: 'If we don't change this, someone will die here.' Something was very definitely wrong on the weekend of that final race. He'd fallen out of love with the sport. You want someone to drag him away from the car – Sid Watkins actually tried to. Senna's answer to any problem had always been to get in the car and drive, but on that particular Sunday it didn't look like the answer."

Something went wrong to make Senna's car go off the track, but it's still not clear today what exactly happened. "The Tamburello corner is not one that a driver of Senna's ability would make a mistake on," says Kapadia. "His death was the result of the freak circumstance of his car hitting the corner at that angle, the wheel coming off at that particular angle and speed, and a part of the suspension arm piercing his helmet – there was no other bruising anywhere on his body."

"For a man who thanked God every time he got in a car, this was an act of God."

■ *'Senna' is in cinemas now, and is reviewed on page 76*

Into the abyss

Kerry Tribe's exhibition finds meaning in the gaps of memory, says Brian Dillon

"The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack between two eternities of darkness." The opening sentence of Vladimir Nabokov's autobiography 'Speak, Memory' was a motto of sorts for Kerry Tribe's temporally intricate and formally subtle exhibition 'Dead Star Light'. The LA-based Kerry's videos, films and installations have long described the lures of collective and individual recall, but rarely has her memory-soaked art come into such clear focus as here, in a show comprised of an audio installation, two expanded films and one video.

It's the lapses that are most instructive. In her black-and-white 16mm film 'Parnassius Mnemosyne' (2010) – named after a favoured butterfly of Nabokov's, reproduced in 'Speak, Memory' – it's at first impossible to say what one's looking at: luminous grey forms roil as the Möbius film loop describes a giant X, tethering the projector to the gallery ceiling. The images are, in fact, derived from a microscopic view of the wings of the insect itself, looming uncertainly like distant nebulae or enigmatic patterns on a radar screen. If the work partly recalls Stan Brakhage's 'Mothlight' (1963), where insect wings were pasted on to the celluloid, this film is more fundamentally an exercise in teasing the viewer with possibility: each time the loop recurs, one is a little more daring but a little less certain whether these soft, steely forms are living or dead, animal or mineral.

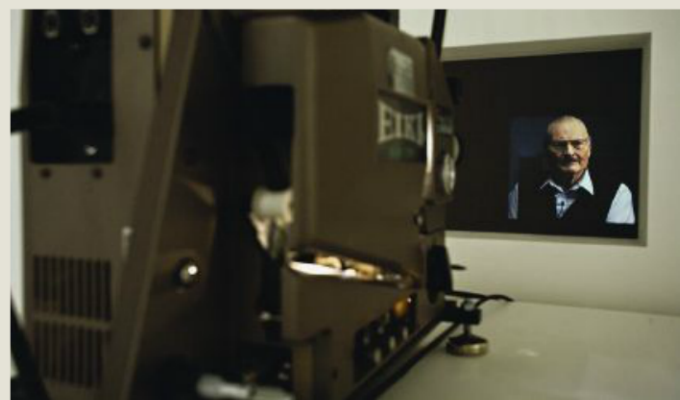
In that sense, 'Parnassius Mnemosyne' is a spectral analogue of the looping, forgetful fate of one Henry Gustav Molaison, subject of

Tribe's twin-screen film 'H.M.' (2009). In 1953, Molaison had an operation to cure his epilepsy; most of his hippocampus was removed, leaving him with anterograde amnesia – he could recall events before surgery but now had a memory of no more than 20 seconds. 'H.M.' is a documentary of sorts, based on his doctor's recollections, with Molaison played by an elderly actor... Or so it seems, as the film is riddled with aporias: Molaison seems to recall events from 20th-century history, but when corresponding images flash up on screen, the dates are wrong. More than this, the twin screens show the film 20 seconds apart, long enough for the viewer to lose track and imagine that the second is an alternate take.

It's these holes in memory that intrigue the artist, none more significant than that suffered by Sergei Krikalov, subject of Tribe's video 'The Last Soviet'. A Russian cosmonaut stranded aboard the Mir space station while the Soviet Union fell apart in 1991, he returned after almost a year in space to find the cultural-political world he knew had fallen into the dustbin of history. Tribe's video plays devious games with this history, mocking up the empty Mir interior, complete with objects floating in zero gravity.

The same blurring of fiction and fact is evident in the installation 'Milton Torres Sees a Ghost', based on a US pilot's account of engaging an apparent UFO over East Anglia in 1957. Here, Torres's words emerge from a length of reel-to-reel tape that hugs two gallery walls, trembling and flickering as it goes, bearing a story that has only lately escaped the redactions of official history.

■ 'Dead Star Light' is at the Camden Arts Centre, London, until 10 July



Two heads are better than one: Tribe's twin-screen film about an amnesiac, 'H.M.'



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Image: Still from *The Man Who Sold The World* (2009) Imad & Sweil Noury

Loss of the money man

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. The late 1980s and early 1990s were the Wild West of the film industry, a period of extravagant gestures, 36-plane fly-bys to promote a movie about Father Christmas, and a swashbuckling attitude towards money that the Zukors, Foxes and Laemmles of early Hollywood would have recognised and embraced. Those days are long gone now, but their final echo faded into silence at the beginning of May with the death of Frans Afman. Frans was the man who, more than any other, epitomised the decade of revolving credit facilities that kept in contention a series of companies who made the movie business fun.

Frans came into entertainment-industry banking in a period when the Netherlands was the centre of the venture-capital world. The bank for which he headed up the film-finance accounts was *Crédit Lyonnais Nederland*, a hybrid, slightly out-of-control financial house that was born when French banking giant *Crédit Lyonnais* acquired Dutch merchant bank *Slavenburg* and used it as the base for its more (shall we say) adventurous banking forays. These took place far enough away from Paris to be out of sight, but close enough to be in the till. Such forays included film – and Frans, who supervised them. A former cavalry officer turned banker, he should have been a suit. But he was much, much more than that.

It's hard, after the meltdown of the late 2000s, to see buccaneering bankers as romantic heroes. But that was a more innocent age and the loaning of money to film companies at least involved a recognisable form of financial transaction: a bank lending money against an asset. True, the asset did not yet exist. But it would soon do so – a far cry from the money-begets-money financial instruments of recent memory.

The Netherlands was in the forefront of that kind of film financing because of its seagoing history: the high-risk deal necessary to make a film was broadly similar to the high-risk deal involved in shipbuilding in general, and the building of supertankers in particular. A supertanker costs tens of millions of dollars and takes three years to build – by which time, given the constant fluctuation in oil prices, there may be no demand for supertankers. In which case, the investor loses. On the other hand, there might be a shortage of them, in which case the investor wins



It was a period when the triangular – or paper/scissors/stone – structure of the movie business revealed itself

– and very nicely, too. Same with independent films: back then they cost up to \$30 million to make and could either become major hits or die over one weekend at the box office. But banks mainly loved films because you could basically invent their value when you first booked them. “We are backing this film which will make \$50 million internationally” means that you suddenly have an extra \$50 million on the books. Banking is quite simple when you get down to it. It's just that you have to have the money.

Frans loved the film industry, but he was always a banker at heart, and he balanced the two skills adroitly. At one stage, *Crédit Lyonnais Nederland* had over a billion dollars in rolling credit facilities out to a series of film companies, most of which are long gone and some of which were short-lived. The whole edifice came crashing down when the bank's French owners overruled Frans by agreeing to loan money to an Italian financier called Giancarlo Piretti, who planned to buy out the then ailing French production company and cinema chain *Pathé* – which he proceeded to do, with the bank's money. This in turn enabled him to leverage that deal into the purchase price for ailing Hollywood studio *MGM* – and the dominos began to tumble. Anyone (and certainly Frans) could see that the numbers would never add up, but banks are easily blinded by greed, and the interest rates on the loans were mouth-wateringly high.

Piretti had little interest in films, but this was not true of most of the buccaneering moguls of that age – figures such as Menahem Golan of Cannon, Bob Shaye of New Line

and Harvey Weinstein of Miramax (who of course came later, and still survives). They made the business of film as interesting as – and often more interesting than – the films that came out of it. They weren't all crap. Cannon may have been mainly a conveyor of production-line schlock, but it also backed films by directors such as Robert Altman, Fred Schepisi, Barbet Schroeder, Andrei Konchalovsky and even Jean-Luc Godard (who made for it the infamous version of *King Lear*, featuring Norman Mailer, Woody Allen and Julie Delpy).

It was a period when the triangular – or paper/scissors/stone – structure of the movie business revealed itself most perfectly. If creativity is paper, technology scissors and money stone, then no one element will always determine the fortune of a film. The late 1980s was very much the stone age in this respect, but it couldn't build its house without the scissors – and least of all without the paper. Frans appreciated that in a way the corporate number crunchers of today do not.

We talked over the years about the autobiography he could write. I said, “You have to name the names, tell us where the bodies are hidden.” Frans wanted to tell all the wonderful stories of deal memos signed on a napkin in the Carlton, and of yachts carrying suitcases full of cash sailing up the coast to stash it in Monaco. So we kept saying, “Next year, perhaps.”

He was in his element in Cannes, and was so determined he was going to come this year that he had his flight and villa booked, his suitcase packed. He died exactly a week before the festival's opening night.

◆ Nick Roddick

● **London Indian Film Festival** brings 12 of the best recent Indian films to London, including Anurag Kashyap's 'That Girl in Yellow Boots', Gaurav Pandey's 'Shukno Lanka' ('Dry Red Chillies'), Ketan Mehta's 'Rang Rasiya' ('Colours of Passion'), and 'Laadli Laila' ('Virgin Goat') by Murali Nair (winner of the *Caméra d'Or* for his debut 'Marana Simhasanam'/'Throne of Death'). BFI Southbank, V&A, Nehru Centre and other London venues, 30 June to 12 July.

● **Liverpool Arabic Film Festival** screens a selection of old and new films from the Arab world, including Khaled El Hagar's 1993 film 'Little Dreams', three Youssef Chahine films including his 1969 drama 'The Land', and Swel and Imad Noury's 'The Man Who Sold the World' (2009). FACT, Liverpool, 4-10 July. See www.arabicartsfestival.co.uk

● **Open City London Documentary Festival** is a new event that presents recent documentaries alongside archive films, among them Claude Lanzmann's 'Shoah' and his recent 'The Karski Report' (the latter presents an interview originally conducted for the former that was left out of the finished film). Other programmes include a retrospective of Tim Hetherington's films, following his tragic death in Libya earlier this year, and a focus on Polish and Czech documentary. Various venues, London, 16-19 June.

● **The Great White Silence** – Herbert Ponting's restored 1924 film of Captain Scott's ill-fated Antarctic expedition – won 'Best Archival Restoration' title at May's FOCAL International Awards. Congratulations to all our BFI colleagues who worked on the restoration.



● **Watch Me Move: On the Big Screen** is a summer-long celebration of animation at the Barbican, the film programme complementing an exhibition running in the art gallery. The season hosts retrospectives of Jan Svankmajer and Studio Ghibli, a screening of Georges Méliès's 'A Trip to the Moon' (above) with live soundtrack, and the London International Animation Festival in September. Barbican, London, July to Sept.

DAZE OF HEAVEN

Terrence Malick's first film in six years, *'The Tree of Life'* won the Palme d'Or at Cannes this year—a first for the legendarily reclusive director. **Nick James** unravels the film's mysteries, while overleaf Mexican DP **Emmanuel Lubezki** describes his unique three-film collaboration with Malick

The single image that has remained most vividly in my mind from Terrence Malick's Palme d'Or-winner *The Tree of Life* is a brief shot of actress Jessica Chastain levitating in a calf-length dress. It's as if she's swimming above the ground, like an angel in a renaissance painting. I'll come to her role in the film later, because it's not the drama of performances that first fires this epic hymn to life—it's the pictures and the music.

For Malick, the legendarily unprolific veteran auteur, it seems that things that float and twist in the air best describe God's creation. Think of phenomena like the strange, portentous inter-swooping dance of starlings that can take place towards the end of day, during the magic hour so beloved of this director. Or take the image that opens *The Tree of Life*: a semi-occluded, mysterious ➔





A SHADOW IN EDEN

In an idyllic Texan childhood, the young Jack (Hunter McCracken, right) observes how his mother (Jessica Chastain) dotes on his younger brother

PLANET ENTERTAINMENT/ALBUM/AMG IMAGES (3)

Terrence Malick *The Tree of Life*



PHOTOPOST INC/CO

◀ orange light that glows and pierces the darkness almost in individual beams.

And then there's the protagonist, Jack O'Brien (Sean Penn), a present-day, dark-suited architect imprisoned on high walkways by the glass towers of downtown Dallas, which reflect the shattered sky as the camera spins around him. If twisting in the heavens (as our planet does) is a motif, then here is half a film devoted to it, as if everything referred to the DNA spiral or a specimen being examined in a 3D modelling application.

The Tree of Life's kick-start is a challenging quotation from the Book of Job:

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

*Tell me, if you have understanding,
who determined its measurements
— surely you know!*

We meet Jack the architect as he is ruminating on the meaning of suffering. Soon we go back in

time to his Texan family, initially to the early 1960s. Tragedy is about to befall an archetypal household: a telegram reveals the death of Jack's younger brother at the age of 19, thereby inflicting Job-like pain on the parents. Though Mrs O'Brien (Chastain) is the embodiment of Christian grace, and Mr O'Brien (Brad Pitt) stands for nature in all its cruel-to-be-kind – and perhaps Darwinian – ways, both must suffer alike. Grace, we learn from the voiceover, “doesn't need to please itself” as nature does. We are drawn then into a vortex of half-whispered, prayer-like questioning, coming from the adult Jack in the present, and from the mother and father in the past.

The memory of this tragedy fractures the film wide open, as Malick's exposition of what believers might call the mystery of God's will shifts us into vivid contemplation of his works and the origin of life. (The sequence that follows is very close to descriptions of the footage accumulated by Malick

for his mystery-shrouded aborted feature, possibly entitled *Q*, the abandonment of which circa 1980 inaugurated his long mid-career silence.) Here *The Tree of Life* moves into the realms of spectacular natural-science footage, of the kind that makes BBC science series like *Wonders of the Solar System* and *Planet Earth* so compelling. Exploding sun storms, dividing cells, microbial activity, transparent deep-sea jellyfish-like creatures and spurting volcanoes abound – the kind of breathtaking, hard-to-identify footage that makes us buy HD televisions. There are even prehistoric monsters depicted in a scene that observes either a dinosaur Christ (to be far-fetched about it) or (more likely) the first act of compassion from a dinosaur predator towards a dying victim.

This fabulous visual tone poem – on which five editors and the legendary visual-effects guru Douglas Trumbull worked – is an experience akin to Kubrick's *2001* (and even in some ways to

If one consistent theme bridges all of Malick's cinema, it's the fall of mankind from some kind of Garden of Eden

LOOK BACK IN WONDER

In adulthood, architect Jack O'Brien (Sean Penn, top) remembers his Texan childhood dominated by his volatile father (Brad Pitt, below)

Gaspar Noé's *Enter the Void*). Far more than the snatches of dialogue and muttered voiceover prayers, it's classical music – mostly of a sublime religious persuasion – that drives this section. The range is breathtaking in itself, including the classics (Bach, Berlioz, Brahms, Couperin, Holst, Mahler, Mozart, Mussorgsky, Respighi, Schumann, Smetana), familiar modern spiritualists (Górecki, Kancheli, Preisner, Tavener) and other names from the outer reaches (Lupica, Jovanovic, Baird, Wiese, Szemzo, Hykes).

Watching this spectacle, the mind genuinely does boggle between two different kinds of incredulity. Even as this magisterially elliptical film wows you with its slowly nurtured sense of wonder, you're often brought up short by its near-allergic avoidance of drama, and by the seeming vacuity of the voiceover's non-sequitur questions: "How did you come to me?" (does she mean God or the dead son?); "How did she bear it?" (the son asks

pointlessly). The film is as rich in the clichés of prayer and beauty – sunflowers, candles, waterfalls – as it is in the more awesome images and camera moves that are its most alluring facet.

Chief of all the glories of the world's creation, *The Tree of Life* seems to imply, is Mrs O'Brien herself. Gorgeously pale, redheaded and befreckled (not unlike Sissy Spacek, the actress who played Malick's first heroine in 1973's *Badlands*), Chastain plays her radiantly. She glows and floats in simple 50s dresses, often barefoot in the grass, but barely says more than a word to anyone on screen – though she has her small share of the God-questioning voiceover. In other words, she's about as believable as any completely saintly supermother.

Nothing can tarnish her image; but when the film settles further back into the 1950s and the saga of Jack's childhood, hints emerge to challenge the initial impression that – until the arrival of the telegram – she presided over a sort of Eden. With trademark obliqueness, Malick has young Jack catch glimpses of Dad raging at Mom. Hard lessons in yard management from Dad interrupt the constant athletic rampaging of the boys in the street and around the timber-frame houses so redolent now of Ralph Lauren chic. By the end of the film, you almost feel that you could plot out a diagram of the area: the houses and the trajectories of the ball games the boys play. It's mythic stuff, with Pitt better than I've ever seen him as the close-monitoring disciplinarian father, an inventive man who does not lack love for his children, but is nonetheless a ball of contained frustration. Hunter McCracken, meanwhile, broods magnificently as the boyhood Jack, simmering with hostility as he obeys his father's relentless commands.

Apocalyptic strain

The premiere at Cannes of this phenomenal, neo-Christian piece of work celebrating what's precious about life felt all the more apposite given that the news was full of predictions of the end of days, and the festival's programme itself was riddled with films that want to prepare us either for doom, or at least for a less than rosy future (see the reports that follow this article). *The Tree of Life* also seems fitted for a moment when serious cinephilia has adopted much of the fervour of a religion – perhaps in reaction to the increasing pressure on the theatrical distribution of such works (and distributor wrangles have already delayed *The Tree of Life*'s UK release).

In these contexts, Malick looks increasingly like the unconscious father of modern American cinema, for he seems to have become the dominant philosophical as well as stylistic influence on a younger generation of filmmakers. A Malickian apocalyptic strain has long been apparent in Paul Thomas Anderson's films: the rain of frogs in *Magnolia* (1999); the whole theme (and the use of Malick regular Jack Fisk as production designer) of *There Will Be Blood* (2007). Australian Andrew Dominik's US film *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007) seems as anxious to evoke Malickian magic-hour tone poems as it is to tell its story. Another acknowledged acolyte is David Gordon Green, in his early films such as *George Washington* (2000) and the Malick-produced *Undertow* (2004).

Green also happens to be one of the producers of *Take Shelter*, the most neo-Malickian film in Cannes this year. Directed by Jeff Nichols (another self-confessed acolyte), it too stars Jessica Chastain as another radiant wife and mother dealing with the terrifying apocalyptic visions of her husband Michael Shannon. Meanwhile Sean Durkin's super-sinister *Martha Marcy May Marlene* drenches its sex-cult flashbacks with a Malick-like vision of rural 'paradise' straight out of 1978's *Days of Heaven* – though its primary influence is the rather more austere Michael Haneke. (Both of these latter films are described in the Cannes report that follows.)

If one consistent theme bridges all of Malick's cinema, it's that every film re-enacts the fall of mankind from some kind of Garden of Eden. There's the forest idyll in *Badlands* before the law catches up with our murderer and his muse; in *Days of Heaven* there's the rural 'heaven' of the wheat fields before the locusts and the fire come; the divide between the island paradise and the inferno of war in *The Thin Red Line* (1998) is similarly marked, while *The New World* (2005) sees Pocahontas lured away from her state of primitive innocence. What makes *The Tree of Life* most intriguing, then, is that 1950s suburban America itself seems (for a while at least) to be Eden – and there's evidence that it seemed that way to many. (Four of my US critic colleagues in Cannes told me that the film pretty exactly describes their own childhoods.) So, whether or not we go the whole hog and believe in a creator, we can still believe in the verisimilitude of the O'Brien family's life.

Malick, like his acolytes, insists that we look around and marvel at creation. I can go with him that far but, as a non-believer, I am far less beguiled by the somewhat childlike questioning of God's will in the voiceover (almost a Malick cliché in itself). Yet it's remarkable how often a suspension of disbelief in grace – or at least in extrasensory abilities – is a requirement in recent cinema.

The idea of the American suburbia of the 1950s and early 60s as a failed Garden of Eden (until it was destroyed by the damaged patriarchs who sacrificed their offspring to Vietnam) pervades so much American culture, from *Back to the Future* and *Mad Men* to the novels of John Cheever and Richard Yates. We can see in retrospect that the period represents the peak moment of American power. In *The Tree of Life*, astonishing as it may be, Malick can thus be seen as yet another baby boomer – who perhaps once rebelled against his father – plumbing for the hero-worship that preceded that 'fall'. What's most touching about the film is its recognition that the riddle of existence and belief in a creator are most severely tested by the greatest personal tragedy that can befall an individual – the parent's loss of a child.

Even at its most clichéd and pious, the film is at the very least the most astonishing family-snapshot screensaver you will ever see. But at its best, *The Tree of Life* is Malick's ultimate re-rendering of his favourite fall-from-Eden theme, a distillation of a truly gracious cinema of longing and regret that touches people as no other auteur's works can.

■ *'The Tree of Life' was originally scheduled for release in May, but at time of going to press it remains unclear when it will be released in the UK* ➔

THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

After using different cinematographers on each of his first three films, Terrence Malick found his ideal collaborator in **Emmanuel Lubezki**, who here describes their work together on *'The New World'*, *'The Tree of Life'* and another as yet unfinished project

I don't remember exactly how many years ago I met Terry [Malick]. He called me – he wanted to talk about a movie based on the last year of Che Guevara's life. We met and he asked me questions about how I would shoot it. He was incredibly calm, and very humble and sweet; he never talked about his work. He wanted to know if I'd liked the five or six pages of the draft he had sent, and what kind of approach I would take. From talking to him, I could tell he was getting very excited about the idea of using natural light and a small crew, and doing most of the movie handheld.

I am from Mexico and speak Spanish; at the time, I thought he was looking for someone who spoke Spanish – he was going to Bolivia and wanted to shoot in the real locations where the story took place. Otherwise, I truly thought when he called me that I didn't have anything in my body of work that would be interesting to him. [At that time Lubezki was best known for *Y tu mamá también* and *Sleepy Hollow*.] I think he saw most of my films, but he didn't talk about them. He was trying to make a personal conversation about Mexico and where I grew up.

We spent three-and-a-half hours sitting and talking in very general terms. He said, "OK, hope to see you soon. Bye-bye." I walked back to my house thinking, "He'll never call me, but what an incredible experience to meet Terrence Malick" – because he was probably my favourite American director. I adore his work; he is somebody looking to tell stories with a pure filmic approach where the movies are not based on theatre, but are much more purely cinematographic.

The next day he called and said, "Why don't we work together?" At that point I started feeling very nervous. I thought I wasn't the right person and that probably I was going to destroy his dreams. We became closer and closer, and started working together with Jack Fisk [the production designer who has worked with Malick on all his movies]. Then the movie fell apart – I think because the completion bond [people] were very anxious about sending all these people to shoot in Bolivia. The country was becoming very unstable politically and socially in the area where we wanted to shoot.

That was a year and a half before we shot *The New World* (2005). He called and said, "I have another script that might have a go at a green light" – [adding] that I probably wouldn't be excited at all. He is so humble that he doesn't know that almost anybody would shoot for him! I said, "Terry, I don't even need to read the script. I'll do whatever you want me to do. I'll shoot seventh unit if you want." He sent me a script that was 300 pages long. I thought it was incredible. I was still slightly nervous about starting such a big movie with



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSH BAKER

MASTER OF SHADOW

Mexican DP Emmanuel Lubezki, above, had worked with Alfonso Cuarón and Tim Burton before getting the call from Malick for *'The New World'*; below

extras and so on – and having no lighting equipment – because I didn't really know how he worked. By the second or third week, I realised it was better not to have electrical equipment – and that I could trust him 100 per cent. He would defer to your vision, but if there was something he didn't like or had questions about, he would ask. [Every day of the shoot] he would come in the morning, we would have a very long meeting and he would

'We create chaos, and within that chaos, things that feel natural – feel real – start to happen'



STILL: POSTERS AND DESIGNS (O)

read all these tiny pieces of paper – little notes – that he has in his front pocket. He would tell us what he was trying to get that day.

Once I understood that it's not only the script that he's trying to get, but all these other elements, the collaboration became better – I could serve him better, help him better. It took me two or three weeks. The first weeks I was still thinking very much the way I was taught to do my work at film school, when you wait for the director to block the scene and then try to work out how to shoot it. With Terry it's much more about trying to *find* the material than impose on it.

Emotions and feelings

With *The Tree of Life*, the period wasn't that important – it happens to be the 1950s. The wardrobe and hair is all very well done, but the idea was to create a little town in Springfield, Texas. We were never trying to portray the 50s in a special way; what we were trying to do was capture certain emotions and feelings. We didn't want the movie to feel nostalgic. I don't know if we succeeded – every time you shoot the 50s, it becomes nostalgic. We were almost like documentary filmmakers, trying to capture the essence of those little moments that Terry needs to build a movie.

It's not a traditional set where Terry blocks a scene and we shoot the dialogue, shoot the blocking, just to give information or a plot point; it's almost the opposite. Terry blocks a scene – and then he destroys it and creates as much chaos as he can. We create chaos, and within that chaos, things that feel natural – feel real – start to happen. Those are the moments we are trying to grasp. Whether it's a moment of joy or the first step of a kid, they are not things you can set up. You can only find them. That is the *modus operandi* of the shooting.

With the non-actors who know nothing about film, it's very simple: they don't know better. It's hard for us but simple for them. The three little boys [who play the O'Brien children] were incredibly well cast – they looked for them for three years. Jessica [Chastain, who plays Mrs O'Brien] came from the theatre, but she didn't really have a lot of film experience; it was very easy to train her to work in that style. Sean Penn [the adult Jack] had worked with Terry before [on *The Thin Red Line*, 1998], and so it wasn't that hard for him.

For Brad Pitt [Mr O'Brien], it was the hardest. When he came to the set for the first time, it reminded me of how I'd felt on set with Terry for the first time [on *The New World*]. Sometimes I would be preparing a shot with 50 extras and Terry would say, "Oh look, the wind is blowing in those trees. Let's run down and bring Pocahontas." I'd say, "We've got 50 extras!" He'd say, "Who cares!"

[On *The Tree of Life*] Brad was trying to understand why we were not doing coverage in a conventional way. As an actor, he does the first take thinking there is going to be a second and a third and a fourth, and maybe he can get better or do something different. He realised he had to work in a different way – it took a little while. I can't talk for him, but my feeling is that he enjoyed it very much. We didn't have marks – he could go almost anywhere.

Once you think you realise what Terry's method is, the next day he can change it completely. You're like, "What happened?!" He'll say, "I want to get all this dialogue in. I don't think it's going to work, but let's shoot it and see." We shoot it and maybe you see a couple of seconds in the movie, or you hear it. He'll use a moment where the actor ends the speech and turns away as the wind blows on the tree.

What's beautiful about a shoot with Terry is that everybody on the set is hyper-aware. We know any moment can be the decisive moment and it will disappear in a second. To be able to shoot like that, you need a great operator, an incredible focus puller. When something is happening, you turn the camera and grab it right there.

Working with kids is unpredictable. All those moments – the first step of the kid, the moment the kid looks in the mirror or goes up the stairs – were really, really hard to get. There is a shot that whenever I see it almost gives me goose bumps, which is of one of the kids sleeping. You can see his reflexes – his hands twitching for a moment when he's just falling asleep. We capture that and it's completely real. When you see it, it reminds you of you and your family. All those little details are so emotive and trigger all those memories. It's almost like a scent when you go into a place, smell something and it triggers all those memories. This movie is like that.

And then there's the scene in which the mother floats. Terry was wondering how a kid would see his mother – how would a kid *feel* about a mother? I had the idea of giving the camera to the kids and seeing if they could shoot from their point of view, looking up to the mother. That didn't work, because the kids couldn't operate the camera. Terry wanted me to shoot the feet of the mother just floating. Somebody said, "Why don't we just pick her up in a crane and carry her and see if it works?" We were very lucky that Jessica happened to be a ballerina – she was very graceful. We were losing the light. It was a shot that Terry didn't believe in, probably because it was slightly theatrical or magical realist. We started shooting and we were just amazed by what she was doing, the time of the day, the light and the dress – it happened to be the



SEEING THE LIGHT
Shooting entirely with natural light, Malick and Lubezki are free to capture unexpected moments such as Jessica Chastain with a butterfly, top

perfect dress – and her hair. Even though we kind of planned it, it was a gift.

I don't know the ratio [of footage shot to footage used], but I'd say we shot a million feet of film. We'd shoot all day. You arrive at the set at 8am and have a meeting that takes an hour and a half. From that meeting on, the camera will be running. We shoot with natural light, but we prepare for that. If you see the movie [*The Tree of Life*], you feel that the family is living in one house – but maybe that house is made of many pieces of different

houses. We have a living room that's facing south; we know we can use it at a certain time of day. We have a couple of rooms that are looking north, and so on. If it starts raining, we don't stop shooting. Especially in *The Tree of Life*, but also in the new one I'm filming with Terry, we don't stop – and we never talk about continuity.

We shot *The Tree of Life* four years ago. We've shot another movie since – it's even more abstract. It doesn't have a title – we call it 'Project D'. If *The New World* was a more narrative movie and *The Tree of Life* was a less narrative movie, this one is even less so. It's been great for me to be able to watch Terry evolving in this way.

Emmanuel Lubezki was speaking to Geoffrey Macnab

SHELTER FROM THE STORM

*Recurring themes of apocalypse and sexual abuse made this year's Cannes a sobering but ultimately inspiring experience, says **Nick James**. Overleaf, **Amy Taubin**, **Jonathan Romney** and **Geoff Andrew** round up their own highlights of the festival*

This year in Cannes it was all too easy to subscribe to the idea that the end of days was upon us – if you were so inclined. Palme d'Or-winner *The Tree of Life*'s worshipful celebration of all that we might lose on this planet was matched by Lars von Trier's rogue planet colliding with Earth in *Melancholia*. These competing epics are described elsewhere in these pages (see p.18 and p.27), and though other films in Cannes touched on impending cataclysm, I'll save them for later. Because by the end of a glorious 12 days – one of the best Cannes festivals I've experienced – the last thing I felt was a sense of doom. So let me begin with three films rapturously received by the critics, each of which pays homage to cinema's past.

Of these, the trickiest to describe without spoiling is Pedro Almodóvar's warping of the





Frankenstein myth, **La piel que habito** (*The Skin I Live In*). Plastic surgeon Robert Ledgard (Antonio Banderas) keeps a woman patient – the gorgeous Vera (Elena Anaya) – under lock and key at his combined mansion-clinic El Cigarral. Clothed in a skin-tight, flesh-coloured burn suit, Vera is being used as a guinea pig for a new, genetically altered hybrid type of skin that has a different sheen and is more resistant to flames and mosquitoes. If you think that's enough to make Ledgard a monster, wait until you see (in an extended flashback) what he does when he finds that his semi-tranquilised, depressive daughter has been raped in the garden during a friend's wedding, and guesses the identity of the culprit. Over that, for the sake of your future pleasure, I must draw a veil.

True to his shape-shifting theme, Almodóvar moves smoothly through the genre changes as if they were gears on a sports car: one minute it's kitsch melodrama, the next Hammer Horror, the next James Bond thriller (with Banderas an evil Bond), the next self-mocking black comedy ("My name is Vera, Vera Cruz"). Macabre as it is, it's as likely to subvert as to celebrate expectations raised by the assertion that it's at once a tribute to Hitchcock, Buñuel and Franju's *Eyes Without a Face*. Almodóvar himself admits he doesn't know what genre the film belongs to. It must be frustrating for him to have reached such a mastery of narrative switchback, only to find that his films have too wide an appeal to win the Palme d'Or.

Aki Kaurismäki's **Le Havre** draws its inspiration from the pre- and post-war classic French cinema of Carné, Bresson, Tati and Melville – a mixed enough bunch. Marcel Marx (puzzle-faced André Wilms), an ageing, dreamy shoeshine man living in Le Havre, is distraught that his devoted wife (Kati Outinen) is in hospital with a potentially fatal illness. When Idrissa (Blondin Miguel), an African boy migrant, escapes a police raid on a container ship, Marcel hides him and tries to organise his escape. Idrissa's dilemma soon unites the tight harbour-side community (with the exception of a snoopier, played twitchily by Jean-Pierre Léaud), and even the black-coated local police inspector (Jean-Pierre Darrousin) seems reluctant to make the pinch.

A faint whiff of liberal self-righteousness doesn't spoil the charm of this very funny and essentially nostalgic film about like-minded bohemians conspiring to outwit the faceless minders of borders. We're used to Kaurismäki's tableaux always being staged in louche-looking bars and apartments, where his actors deliver laconic one-liners; what's less expected from him is a fable whose tone remains cheery and optimistic throughout. The famously dour director could even have a popular hit on his hands.

The greatest of all the pleasures in Cannes this year was **The Artist**, Michel Hazanavicius's tribute to the Hollywood silent-film era – for which Jean Dujardin won the Best Actor prize. He plays George Valentin, a silent-movie star in the Douglas Fairbanks mould, with a comedy dog sidekick whose tricks win over more sceptical hearts. A collision with a young woman fan, Peppy Miller (Bérénice Bejo), in front of the press cameras gives her a start on the fame ladder. All this early success and flirtation is portrayed in the style of a black-

and-white silent film, one brim-full of great gags and stunts, with two genuinely amazing performances from the leads. When Valentin is at the peak of his fame, studio boss Zimmer (John Goodman) demonstrates synchronised sound to him. Naturally, Valentin laughs it off. Soon, however, he is finished in Hollywood, while Peppy becomes one of the first sound movie stars.

Hazanavicius, who made the two OSS 117 spy spoofs, *Cairo: Nest of Spies* and *Lost in Rio*, says he made *The Artist* because all the directors he most admires came from the silent era. There are echoes here of *A Star Is Born*, *City Girl*, *Sunset Blvd.* and – as Valentin seems to develop a Gene Kelly look – *Singin' in the Rain* (only without the songs). The film is every bit as inventive as the Donen-Kelly classic – in one great scene Valentin has a nightmare with full sound effects (which we hear), but nothing will come out of his own mouth. Yes, *The Artist* is pure pastiche – and digital pastiche at that – but I doubt you'll find a more light-hearted, energised and witty package in the cinema this year.

I wish the same could be said for the festival's opening film, Woody Allen's **Midnight in Paris**. Allen desperately wants to charm us with his time-travel excursion into a past full of famous writers and artists, but this is the kind of Allen film that was born naff and stays that way. This time round Owen Wilson plays the Woody avatar, a Hollywood screenwriter on holiday in Paris who really wants to be a novelist, preferably in the 1920s – and one drunken night becomes just that by getting into an old taxi at midnight. There are one or two funny scenes and some great cameos, particularly from Corey Stoll as Hemingway and Adrien Brody as Dali, but overall you'll wish you'd stayed at home.

On and off the game

My experience of Cannes was inflected by serving on the first-ever Grand Prix jury for the Critics' Week, the one-time *salon des refusés* that has since become an institution, this year celebrating its 50th anniversary. This meant going straight from the early-morning competition screening each day to the mid-morning Critics' Week one at the other end of the Croisette. The contrast was always stimulating, and sometimes the more modest strand had the better film. It was by all accounts the best selection the Critics' Week has had for some years. ➔



CHANGE OF TUNE

While Almodóvar mixes horror and black comedy in *'La piel que habito'* (*'The Skin I Live In'*), left, Aki Kaurismäki goes upbeat with *'Le Havre'*, above

◀ Good festivals have rolling themes that dominate for a day or two, then die. This year's programmes were either cunningly put together or just dead lucky in their synchronicity. Films with similar concerns were clustered around the same days, even when they were playing in different sections. At first, sexual subjects dominated. Women directors dealing with promiscuity, prostitution, paedophilia and demon children held sway, before handing the baton to male directors with similar concerns – all leaving an impression that characters who lack affect are a current fascination across the gender divide.

A good example of this tendency is Julia Leigh's directorial debut **Sleeping Beauty**, in which a young woman on the make is asked to perform a strange sexual service. Hanging around in bars to hook up for casual sex, student Lucy (Emily Browning) soon attracts the attention of a high-class establishment that asks her to agree to be drugged so that elderly men can play with her body while she sleeps – and do anything except penetrate her. The atmosphere of the stately manor house where this takes place is familiar from the softcore literary classic *Histoire d'O*, by way of *Eyes Wide Shut*. Leigh talks in the press notes about Lucy's "radical passivity", and says that the basic idea comes from novellas by Kawabata and Márquez.

Lucy is prepped as if she were attending an expensive spa, and told her lipstick has to match the colour of her labia. Once she's asleep, a well-groomed, white-haired naked gent comes in and mutters philosophically while stroking her so-smooth skin. Later a more sinister thuggish, impotent type with a vestigial pony-tail throws her over his shoulder and does her slight harm. *Sleeping Beauty* strains too hard to be serious, but despite my scepticism about its tone, it remains a creditable debut. Every shot and cut is presented with bold assurance – Leigh clearly has control over what she's trying to do. It was probably a mistake to put her film in competition, where it did get a bit of a mauling. Perhaps festival director Thierry Frémaux felt they needed some startling newcomers, because most of the competition selection was so familiar. On the other hand, Leigh's perspective of what I would call the 'unerotic erotic' is about as French as an Australian can get.

But not, perhaps, as pompous as Bertrand Bonello's **L'Apollonide – Souvenirs de la maison close** (**House of Tolerance**), which concentrates, with radical lassitude, on life in an opulent turn-of-the-

This year's programmes were either cunningly put together or just lucky in their synchronicity

century bordello. Languid, half-naked beauties in gorgeous period costume droop in the half-light and complain about their lot, while various (mostly meekly predatory) men drift in and out. A frail fantasy saga of heroic endurance emerges, sometimes set to icky modern pop songs like The Moody Blues' 'Nights in White Satin', but it all seems designed to show a single climactic image that's signalled in the first ten minutes: a clownishly made-up woman, with a terrible scar-extended smile, weeping semen tears.

In the Critics' Week, Zou Peng's amiable Cassavetes-lite portrait of working girls and the power structures they operate under, *Chang e* (*Sauna on Moon*), completed a loose trilogy of brothel dramas. But the better films about sex and power in that strand were from women directors. In **Hanotenet (The Slut)**, director-actress Hagar Ben Asher plays a rural Israeli woman living alone with her two daughters. She dispenses eggs to the locals and sexual services to various men in her garden shed – sometimes, carelessly, in sight of the peeking and giggling girls. When a handsome former resident returns to clean up his deceased mother's house, an affair sparks between them, prompting her to rein in her uncomplicated promiscuity. At first, she is grateful for her new lover's willingness to mind her daughters when she wanders off – until serious complications arise.

Where *The Slut* has one woman chafing against her stereotype, **17 filles (17 Girls)** describes an epidemic of pregnancy that runs through a school in a dead-end estuary town in Brittany. Needing to feel as if their lives really matter, a school's core peer group is at first horrified when their rebellious leader (Louise Grinberg) declares that she's with child. But peer pressure prevails and, in one single night, the other girls deliberately get themselves impregnated. Based on a real-life incident in the USA, this sharply observed piece of social

melodrama is constructed with tremendous care and sympathy by sister directors Delphine and Muriel Coulin.

The idea that pregnancy doesn't always turn out for the best is also at the heart of Lynne Ramsay's **We Need to Talk About Kevin**, adapted from the hugely successful novel by Lionel Shriver. When we first meet Tilda Swinton's Eva, she's an American travel writer ecstatically celebrating the famous tomato festival in Buñol, drenched in a luscious red that she will encounter again and again in the film – but that in future will serve as a reminder of the terrible deeds committed by her son. In the present day she's a recluse who's regularly abused by people on the street; in the flashback past she's a wealthy wife and mother of a nasty, manipulative boy. Ferociously powerful, if sometimes overwrought, the film combines a gut-wrenching portrayal of emotional devastation from Swinton, an upsettingly vicious turn from Ezra Miller as Kevin, and an astonishing range of dazzling images from the director: to the fore here are Ramsay's trademark manipulations of scale, fascination with consumer culture, lurid palette, slip-pages of focus and concentration on surfaces.

Possibly the most overrated competition film was Maiwenn's **Polisse**, which won the Jury prize. Some critics seem to have been impressed that the child-protection-unit cops being portrayed talk so openly about what the paedophiles they interview get up to. But while the film confronts paedophilia head on, Maiwenn also trivialises it as a subject for drama: first, by allowing its cast to shout and scream and generally overact as if they were in a cop soap opera; second, by casting herself as a terribly shy photographer with big glasses, so that she can be the distracting and self-aggrandising love interest; and third, by wrapping up the story with a completely fake-looking, gratuitous suicide.

It's an accusation of paedophilia against a neighbour that brings an intense new father figure, John Bunting (an electrifying Daniel Henshall), into the life of 16-year-old Jamie Vlassakis (newcomer Lucas Pittaway) in **Snowtown**. Based on a notorious true-crime case in Australia and shot where it happened, Justin Kurzel's film has a fierce, unrelenting power that won it a special mention from Lee Chang-dong, the president of our jury. Jamie's mother has brought Bunting in to deal with the "filthy pervert" – her ex. Bunting gets Jamie involved in the intimidation by having him help dump chopped-up bits of kangaroo all over the neighbour's front porch and spray "fag" on his ▶



MIDNIGHT IN PARIS



HANOTENET (THE SLUT)



WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT KEVIN

THE ONGOING MOMENT

Exuberance, madness and the enduring power of the image were the story of this year's Cannes for **Jonathan Romney**

Festival director Thierry Frémaux promised the Cannes faithful a good time this year, and of course, some were sceptical in advance. Surely fun wasn't at all what the competition should be about? Surely people go to Cannes to kneel at the shrine of cinematic seriousness? But no, Frémaux wasn't kidding, and the best thing about this year's selection was the sight of filmmakers enjoying themselves – indulging in the pleasures not just of making images, but of spinning narratives.

For visual splendour, nothing beat Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* (see p.18), although the word 'kitsch' feels oddly inadequate to capture the excessiveness of its image torrent. But I had no trouble with the kitsch element in Lars von Trier's **Melancholia** – a film destined to be overlooked because of the director's ludicrous "I am a Nazi" gaffe. There is a real sense in which von Trier's interest in German imagery needs assessing, but this is nothing to do with his stated admiration for Albert Speer. (Incidentally, anyone seriously curious about von Trier's fascination with fascism should take another look at his near-forgotten 1991 film *Europa*, a fantasy about a resurgent Nazi underground in post-war Germany.)

No doubt von Trier set off alarm bells in the first place by layering *Melancholia* with swathes of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* – although that's more likely to brand him a cliché peddler than a Nazi. What makes *Melancholia* so memorable and audacious – although I may be in the minority – is that he crams his most imposing devices into the opening seven minutes. *Melancholia*'s dreamlike prelude is mesmerisingly strange – an echo of, but entirely different from the prettified manipulation of *Antichrist*'s opening. Together with the CGI evocation of the Earth pulverised by another planet (watch this, Michael Bay, and weep), we are given images of surpassing strangeness, slowed down so that they resemble almost stationary holograms: Kirsten Dunst striding in her wedding gown, enmeshed in ashen strands of rope-like material; Charlotte Gainsbourg carrying a child across a golf course that seems to have turned to swamp; a nightscape lit by the moon and a rogue planet... The uncanny quality of these high-artifice images – which are reminiscent, more than anything, of the work of video artist Bill Viola – was hardly justified by the narrative explanation, late in the film, that they were dreamed by Dunst's character Justine.

No less unsettling are the film's shifts of tone. After the prelude comes a long section – shot in a style recalling *Festen* – that stages Justine's wedding as a farcical comedy of manners, with Kiefer Sutherland and Charlotte Rampling among the appalling family members. (This section also



PERSPECTIVE OF A PERSONA NON GRATA
While von Trier's personal image was dented by his press-conference antics, *'Melancholia'*, starring Kirsten Dunst, is nevertheless strikingly individual

recalls von Trier's anomalous shot at comedy in *The Boss of It All*). The final chapter – focusing on Gainsbourg, as Justine's sister – strips away all but a handful of the characters to allow us to quietly contemplate the imminent end of the world. I found this section genuinely eerie, with a shiver of mystery that feels obscurely close to Bergman. Others found the film hyperbolic and portentous, but then I felt much that way about *Antichrist*. Lars von Trier may have shot his career in the foot, but that shouldn't blind us to the advances made by a filmmaker who continues to be genuinely unpredictable – in good ways as well as idiotically bad ones.

The competition film that gave me most pleasure was Paolo Sorrentino's **This Must Be the Place**. This new English-language film is simply Sorrentino's most exuberant and wayward yet. Sean Penn proves at last that he has a sense of humour by kitting himself up like The Cure's Robert Smith to play Cheyenne, a retired rock star who lives in jaded splendour in Dublin. After revealing that Cheyenne is from a New York Orthodox Jewish background (you'd think nothing could be more goyish than a goth), Sorrentino sends him, with his little suitcase on wheels, across America to track down a Nazi in hiding. Some viewers found the film preposterous and unfocused, but the whole point of a road

movie is that it should take you to unexpected places. This one certainly did, with an astonishing David Byrne concert sequence, a Harry Dean Stanton cameo that nods to *Paris, Texas*, and home scenes (with Frances McDormand as Cheyenne's cheerfully supportive wife) suggesting that Sorrentino is a close watcher of *The Osbournes*. Flamboyantly shot by DP Luca Bigazzi, *This Must Be the Place* crackles with imagination – it must be the most energetic film ever made about a chronically fatigued protagonist.

Though I barely dipped into the sidebars outside the Palais, I do want to put a word in here for one of this year's overlooked orphans, Ruben Ostlund's **Play**, screened in Directors' Fortnight. A follow-up to 2008's *Involuntary*, it seems to occupy similar terrain but is more focused and detached in its people-watching techniques, using long takes that allude to (but don't mimic) surveillance video. The sustained narrative is about one group of kids (African immigrants) conning another (middle-class white Swedes) into yielding meekly to their authority – what you might call an extreme version of Stockholm syndrome. As you watch Ostlund's victims follow their hypnotiser on a long and unpredictable trip, this compelling, uneasy drama becomes an acute study of power, language, ritual and racial identity. You worry slightly that the film might possibly have been made primarily to be discussed in sociology seminars, but *Play* remains a provocative work that doesn't deserve to be obscured by more obvious Cannes controversies.

◀ windows. The neighbour moves out, but it's not long before Bunting's homicidal instincts are turned to others – the general atmosphere of street vengeance seems to give him carte blanche, and Jamie gets increasingly sucked into his grim and gruelling, hysterically violent world.

By contrast, the paedophile lifestyle drama **Michael** is, on the surface at least, calm almost throughout. With its superfine control of a stripped-down *mise en scène* (a typical trait of modern Austrian cinema), Markus Schleinzer's directorial debut gives us a well-drawn quotidian portrait of a nervy, owl-like man who happens to have a male child imprisoned in his basement. Showing how close to ordinary people paedophiles can be, Schleinzer finds room in his otherwise chilly film for pathos, humour and left-field accidents. It's an appropriately quiet sort of *tour de force*.

Reporting for our website, I pondered why women directors like Asher and Leigh describe worlds in which sex is just a matter of barter and men are often potential paedophiles – but that was before I saw all the related films by men. Overall Cannes did make me feel in its first week as if too many films were deliberately preparing us for a more brutally determinist future.

Into the badlands

Straight after Malick's *The Tree of Life*, I saw another film that seemed to mark a switch in theme from sexual subjects to religious ones. This was a surprise: **Hors Satan (Outside Satan)**, the first Bruno Dumont film since 1997's *La Vie de Jésus* that has remotely interested me. A teenage goth girl living on a farm has befriended a shaman-like stranger, who's camped in the sand dunes of the Pas de Calais coast. He prays to the horizon and then commits an act of summary justice on the farmer (her father or stepfather? – we never find out, but somehow we presume sexual abuse to be involved). This is the first of many ambiguous actions that could be interpreted as the work either of Satan or of Christ. In this elliptical parable, with its nod to the novels of George Bernanos, Dumont's mysticism seems less risible than usual. That's not to say that it's altogether believable, but this is a coherent and beautiful parable of a kind you could imagine Pasolini making.

Drive is Nicolas Winding Refn's enjoyable adaptation of a James Sallis novel, which comes on like a Walter Hill picture from the 1970s. Ryan Gosling uses his pale blue eyes and slow-burn half-smile to

Cannes did make me feel as if too many films were preparing us for a more brutally determinist future

channel a different Ryan – Ryan O'Neal, in Hill's *The Driver* (1978). Playing a movie stunt driver who doubles as a getaway man, Gosling is prone to statements like: "You've got me for five minutes. No more, no less. After that five minutes I'm gone." You almost believe him, until you see him mooning after his neighbour in his new apartment building – Carey Mulligan. She's supposed to be the wife of a felon in prison (and the mother of a son), but since to British eyes she looks indelibly like a middle-class 15-year-old, you never quite buy it. Hill's movies had believable street faces; Mulligan's, somehow, just isn't one. All their ensuing flirtation happens in the brief interlude before *Drive* becomes a 21st-century movie – in other words, the ultra-violence starts.

As if to illustrate what you can do with car chases, there was Na Hong-jin's **The Yellow Sea** (aka *The Murderer*), about a debt-ridden taxi driver who's forced to do a hit for his gangster creditors. But when he finally steels himself to do the deed, he finds there are two assassins ahead of him – who botch the job, so he has to finish them off, as well as his target. Cue the arrival of the police – and the beginning of the most hectic and inventive chase movie I've seen for some time, with two rival hatchet gangs joining in.

If you prefer crime movies with a more political perspective and a deeper sense of character, then the best on offer in Cannes was **Miss Bala**, from director Gerardo Naranjo (*I'm Going to Explode*). Jessica (Irene Azuela), a lanky beauty from a poor family, wants to get into the team for the local pageant. Her friend gets her to come along to a nightclub full of off-duty cops, where they hope to get noticed – but a gang raids the club, intending to kill everyone inside. Jessica escapes, but when she tries to tell a cop what she has witnessed, he delivers her to the gang. From here on in, our passive and perpetually terrified heroine is made

to endure all sorts of trials, which take her across the US border and back. But this is a film where what's going on around Jessica is just as important as her own crisis. It feels like an authentic portrait of life on the edge in violent Mexico.

The best is yet to come

Lee Chang-dong, my jury colleagues and I awarded the Grand Prix to Jeff Nichols's **Take Shelter**, a powerful film about prophecy that has strong links to Malick's *The Tree of Life*. First, there's the presence of Jessica Chastain as Samantha LaForche, once again playing a staunch and radiant red-headed mother who stands by her difficult husband while protecting their daughter (though Nichols's film is set in the present, not the 1950s). Curtis LaForche (the magnificent Michael Shannon) is a drilling-rig worker who begins to have nightmares about a coming catastrophe. Since his mother was long ago diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic, he responds in two contradictory ways: he seeks the help of a therapist, but at the same time ruinously borrows money to expand and equip their storm shelter.

In the moments when the family pulls together, you see the potential in Samantha to take over completely – a likely outcome if it's economic disaster that hits the blue-collar family, rather than the chorus line of twistlers that haunts Curtis's dreams. We even see the same portent of starlings doing the twisting skipping-rope in the sky that we saw in *The Tree of Life* – except that these starlings swoop to attack. *Take Shelter* wears its debt to Malick with pride, but Nichols also taps into a spreading mood of quiet fear about a planet threatened by natural disasters, and nails contemporary anxiety about the out-of-control world economy just as powerfully.

There are Malick-like elements to another fine US indie film, Sean Durkin's **Martha Marcy May Marlene**, but in this instance the influence of another key Cannes auteur is even stronger. A young woman, Martha (Elisabeth Olsen), breaks free from a cult commune and escapes to the lake-side house of her well-off sister (Sarah Paulson). We learn pretty quickly that Martha has been systematically raped by the cult leader (John Hawkes), but her sister's super-capitalist lifestyle as the wife of a British businessman (Hugh Dancy) now feels wrong to her. It's while she sleeps that we learn, in magic-hour Malick-like fragments, just how sinister and implacable the cult is. The elegiac atmosphere of *Days of Heaven* and parts of *Badlands*



MICHAEL



THE YELLOW SEA



MARTHA MARCY MAY MARLENE

is an obvious touchstone for Durkin, but the lake-side location so redolent of the US version of *Funny Games* – plus the presence of Brady Corbet as one of the cult members – makes the film seem as much under Michael Haneke's sway. And, like Haneke, Durkin is brilliant at withholding comforting information.

The old guard

So what of the more established directors at Cannes? You could see the award of the Palme d'Or to Terrence Malick as an indication that Cannes has surrendered to the 'wow' factor (or perhaps they've simply been wanting to give Malick a prize to go with his Best Director for *Days of Heaven*, but he's been too unprolific to provide the opportunity). *The Tree of Life* was not, in my view, the best film in Cannes – it was the best spectacle. Instead the accolade should go to one of the last two films I'll write about here – though I can't decide which.

The Dardenne brothers may be the most consistently high-achieving filmmakers of our time – the kings, if you like, of poetic neorealism. Like all their films, *Le Gamin au vélo* (*The Kid with a Bike*) is near perfect. A fortunate accident brings neglected 12-year-old Cyril (an exceptional performance from Thomas Doret) into the life of single hairdresser Samantha (Cécile de France), who wants to help him. The boy moves in with her, but a local tough, seeing Cyril's pugnacious nature as an opportunity, gets him to commit a robbery. Which way will the boy's life go? You can never be quite sure in a Dardenne film – until you get to the end and feel the heart-rending emotional pull of their consummate storytelling.

Equally masterful is Nuri Bilge Ceylan's super-subtle ultra-slow burn of a crime film, *Bir Zamanlar Anadolu'Da* (*Once upon a Time in Anatolia*). This reticent tale requires one's powers of concentration to be at their sharpest as we witness a three-vehicle police team being led through the dusk by the perpetrators of a murder, to find the corpse of their victim buried somewhere in the hills. A change in style for Ceylan after the thunderous noir of *Three Monkeys* (2008), it's shot in a more plainly realist style. The drama shifts in a relay from character to character – from explosive veteran cop to terrified killer to troubled investigator to haunted doctor. As the investigation takes all night, the film comes to feel like a rumination on storytelling, told as if around a campfire. Ceylan saves up and delivers his jewel-like surprises with the precision of a Chekhov – and I can't wait to see it a second time.



LE GAMIN AU VELO (THE KID WITH A BIKE)

THE REVOLUTION OF INACTION

Made under house arrest, Jafar Panahi's *'In Film Nist'* ('This Is Not a Film') breaks all the rules, says **Amy Taubin**



Smuggled into France on a USB flash drive rumoured to have been hidden in a cake, Jafar Panahi and Mojtaba Mirtahmaseb's *In Film Nist* (*This Is Not a Film*) gave the Cannes festival – and moviemaking itself – an incontestable reason for being. Viewed under any circumstances, the movie (a more appropriate designation than the 'film' of the title, since it's an entirely digital production) would merit a high place among the great works of Iranian cinema and modernist (ie reflexive) documentary. Posed against the deadly serious grandiosity of Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* and the ironically apocalyptic psychodramatics of Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*, Panahi's extreme poverty of means (the movie was shot with a modest digital camera and a cellphone) could not have represented a starker contrast. The forced limitation of the *mise en scène* (Panahi is under house arrest in his flat), the brilliance of his associative ruminations on the ontology of film and filmmaking, the lively depiction of his daily life – where the mundane and the coincidental occasionally coalesce into evanescent metaphors – the risk entailed in making the movie (and the absolute necessity, for Panahi, of taking that risk) add up to that much overused (especially at Cannes) designation: masterpiece.

While his December 2010 sentence – six years in prison and a 20-year ban on making films – is under appeal, Panahi has been confined to the comfortable flat he shares with his wife and daughter. It is 15 March 2011 – New Year's Day in Iran – and the filmmaker is alone, the rest of his family out visiting relatives. He takes the opportunity to do the forbidden – to turn on his camera. He shoots himself eating breakfast, talking on his mobile with his lawyer (the news isn't good: while his sentence possibly could be reduced, he will definitely have to serve time in prison) and

THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE
Robbed of his freedom to work, Jafar Panahi, above, has made a self-reflexive film about not making a film, *'In Film Nist'* ('This Is Not a Film')

feeding Igi, the family's huge pet iguana, who lumbers around the flat as if it was his prison and climbs over Panahi ("Your claws are too sharp, Igi") as if he was a wall to be scaled. All the while we hear at a distance what sounds like gunfire, but turns out to be traditional New Year fireworks, in defiance of government prohibition.

Sensing something false in his relationship to the camera, Panahi calls on a filmmaker friend to help him: Mojtaba Mirtahmaseb, a specialist in 'making of' documentaries. Why not have him document the process of *not* making a film instead? But, discontented with being merely the subject of Mirtahmaseb's camera, Panahi turns his cellphone lens on his friend to depict their collaboration as a hall of mirrors.

And then the non-movie takes an unexpected turn. A young man arrives in the lift, explaining that he is an art student working as a substitute janitor and he's come to collect the garbage. Do we believe him? Does Panahi? Is he a government spy, or perhaps an actor, hired in advance by the non-director? In any case, Panahi rides down with him in the lift that – unavoidably – suggests a jail cell, recording the often comical process of the garbage collection.

When they reach the courtyard, we see through the lens of Panahi's camera an enormous bonfire outside the building. "Don't go out there, Mr Panahi. They'll see you with the camera," warns the young man. He might as well tell the iguana not to climb the walls of his prison as tell a man whose existence is inseparable from the movies he makes not to shoot the marvellously fortuitous final image of *This Is Not a Film*.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP

Courage in the face of adversity emerges as a common theme in **Geoff Andrew's** survey of non-competition films

Just as the overall standard of the contestants for the Palme d'Or was unusually high this year, so the quality of films in other strands of the official selection was pleasingly consistent. Though it opened with Gus Van Sant's *Restless*, which found few supporters (at least among the English-speaking press), the Un Certain Regard strand included more than its fair share of titles to ignite the enthusiasm. Gerardo Naranjo's *Miss Bala* (see p.28), Joachim Trier's *Oslo, 31 August*, Pierre Schoeller's *L'Exercice de l'état* (*The Minister*), Oliver Hermanus's *Schoonheid* (*Beauty*) and Catalin Mitulescu's *Loverboy* were all bold works from young or new directors, succeeding both as solid character studies and as dramas dealing with contemporary issues, from the baleful – but very different – effects of drugs in Mexico and Norway, through the difficulties of maintaining political ideals in a Western Europe increasingly given over to compromise, to murky sexual interaction in South Africa and Romania. Meanwhile, relative veterans like Hong Sangsoo (*The Day He Arrives*) and Bruno Dumont (*Hors Satan*, see p.28) also won praise.

Emir Kusturica's Un Certain Regard jury decided to share the top prize between Kim Ki-duk's reportedly self-lacerating study of filmmaker's block, *Arirang* (which I sadly didn't see), and Andreas Dresen's *Halt auf Freier Strecke* (*Stopped on Track*). Though not quite as brilliantly concentrated as its predecessor *Cloud 9* (which picked up a prize in the same section a few years ago), the German's film is a brave, unusually honest – and mostly successful – attempt to deal with death. It begins with a stark, unsentimental scene of a hitherto healthy fortysomething (Milan Peschel) learning that he has a malign brain tumour. The scene is set for a partly improvised, painfully plausible account of his rapid physical and mental decline – and the toll it takes on his wife, their barely comprehending children and other family and friends. With acting that's honest and rightly restrained, even in potentially histrionic moments of anger and desperation, the film builds to affecting scenes of the protagonist's final moments, in which a real sense of peace having at least been attained briefly prevails.

An uneasy restlessness is the dominant mood in Mohammad Rasoulof's *Bé Omid é Didar* (*Goodbye*), perhaps not surprisingly, given that the story of Tehran lawyer Noora – banned from practising law due to her work on human-rights cases and trying to organise exit visas for herself and her incarcerated journalist husband – reflects to some degree the experiences of its writer-director, now best known internationally for having been sentenced, along with Jafar Panahi, to six years in prison by the Iranian judiciary. Noora's predicament is



NO WAY OUT
The protagonists of *'Halt auf Freier Strecke'* (*'Stopped on Track'*), above, and *'Bé Omid é Didar'* (*'Goodbye'*), top, are trapped in different ways

further complicated by the fact that (reluctantly) she's pregnant, and officially needs her husband's signature in order to obtain certain medical treatment, or to even check into a hotel. And then there's the seeming ubiquity of bureaucracy, bribery and thugs sniffing out any potential misdemeanour – possession of a TV satellite dish, for example.

The straitened circumstances of the film's making never become problematic, given Rasoulof's decision to employ mostly interior scenes (much taking place within the home Noora shares only with a pet terrapin); the sense of entrapment is greatly enhanced by tight, static compositions, most memorably when two plainclothes cops join her in the lift of her building. Muted colours and unsettling sound design, plus Leyla Zareh's sturdy performance as anxious, determined Noora, also contribute to a suspenseful and powerful political drama.

Jafar Panahi's own film *In Film Nist* (*This Is Not a Film*, see p.29) played out of competition, where two further highlights of the festival were sadly little seen. Michael Radford's *Michel Petrucciani* might also be said to deal with entrapment – one caused by the severity of the 'glass-bone disease' that confined the late French pianist to a terribly fragile, metre-long body. But Petrucciani, notwithstanding a lifespan of just 36 years, overcame all such obstacles with magnificent bravura. There's nothing especially remarkable about Radford's documentary in terms of its cinematic qualities –



he simply relates a good, clear, dramatic story via interviews and plentiful archive footage – but it's supremely entertaining, not only because it boasts so much fine jazz but because its subject was such a fascinating, colourfully charismatic character. A prodigious musical talent, he was possessed of an extraordinary curiosity about and lust for life, as well as an almost childlike sense of responsibility, especially towards the women who fell for his charms. Through the force of his personality and his playing, the film too exudes a thrilling energy.

The other out-of-competition find could hardly be more different. *Labrador* (*Out of Bounds*), by Denmark's Frederikke Aspöck, is a three-hander set on a small, wintry island in the Baltic, where a reclusive, somewhat arrogant painter and the dog that is his sole companion are visited by his daughter and her journalist boyfriend. It's a chamber – or cabin-and-caravan – drama, dryly funny yet keenly alert to the tensions and shifts in allegiance that arise after the young woman reveals she's pregnant. Particularly astute about the more perverse traits of male psychology, both Daniel Dencik's script and Aspöck's lean direction maintain a pleasingly light touch, even as the film moves into more darkly treacherous territory; the acting and Magnus Nordenhof Jønck's excellent camerawork are likewise well attuned to the overall import of the piece. It's a 'small' movie, but why it wasn't included in Un Certain Regard is a mystery, since in its own engagingly modest way, *Labrador* fulfils its ambitions more successfully than many other films on show. Judging by this first feature, Aspöck, a graduate of the festival's Cinéfondation initiative in support of new filmmakers, is someone to watch.



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COMPETITIONS

THE FIGHTER: DVD and Blu-ray editions to be won

David O. Russell's powerful biopic of struggling welterweight boxer Micky Ward and his explosive relationship with his older, drug-addicted brother Dicky won critical praise on its release earlier this year. Russell's raw filmmaking and powerful acting

turns from Mark Wahlberg and Christian Bale mark this as a fascinating drama of coming together against all odds to train for a historic fight. Distributor Momentum Pictures now bring the film to DVD and Blu-ray. We have five copies on each format to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question and state whether you would prefer a DVD or Blu-ray edition.

Q. What was Micky Ward's nickname?

- a. Lowell
- b. Junior
- c. Irish



BFI SCREEN GUIDES: '100 Silent Films' and '100 Film Musicals' to be won

The latest releases in the BFI Screen Guides series are *100 Silent Films* and *100 Film Musicals*. In the former, Bryony Dixon provides an authoritative and accessible history of silent cinema via 100 of its most significant films. She introduces a wide range of classics of the silent period (1895-1930), such as *The Birth of a Nation* and *Metropolis*, alongside more unexpected choices. And in *100 Film Musicals*, Jim Hillier and Doug Pye provide an overview of the development of musicals, the genre's major themes and the critical debates it has provoked. We have five pairs to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. In which D.W. Griffith silent film did Lillian Gish play a character called Susie Broadbains?

- a. The Greatest Question
- b. Intolerance
- c. The Great Love



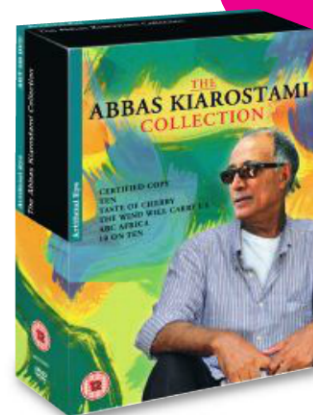
ABBAS KIAROSTAMI: Collection of 1997-2010 films to be won

Abbas Kiarostami is one of Iran's most influential and pioneering filmmakers, now celebrated by Artificial Eye with a box-set of six of his films from 1997-2010. The collection includes his most recent film, *Certified Copy*, three of his acclaimed Iranian-set dramas – *Ten*, *Taste of Cherry* and *The Wind Will Carry Us* – as well as *10 on Ten*, Kiarostami's documentary in which he discusses the methods used on the 2002 film. The previously unavailable documentary *ABC Africa* – about children who have been orphaned by AIDS – is also included. We have two collections to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. For which one of these films did Kiarostami win a Palme d'Or at Cannes?

- a. Certified Copy
- b. Taste of Cherry
- c. Ten



ALEXANDER KORDA: Five biographies to be won

The producer behind such celebrated films as *The Four Feathers* and *The Third Man*, Alexander Korda established a film industry in Britain that rivalled Hollywood, built Europe's biggest studio and created world-class stars. Charles Drazin's biography (published by I.B. Tauris)

traces Korda's path from his rural childhood in Hungary to a British knighthood, and argues that his legacy exemplified the pattern of boom and bust that has dogged British cinema ever since his first international success in the early 1930s. We have five copies to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

Q. Which one of these Rudyard Kipling stories was NOT produced as a film by Alexander Korda?

- a. The Thief of Bagdad
- b. The Jungle Book
- c. The Man Who Would Be King



HOW TO ENTER

Email your answer, name and address, putting either 'The Fighter DVDs', 'Abbas Kiarostami Collection', 'BFI Screen Guides' or 'Alexander Korda book' in the subject heading, to: s&scompetition@bfi.org.uk.

Or send a postcard with your answer to either 'The Fighter DVDs competition', 'Abbas Kiarostami Collection competition', 'BFI Screen Guides competition' or 'Alexander Korda book competition'; Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN

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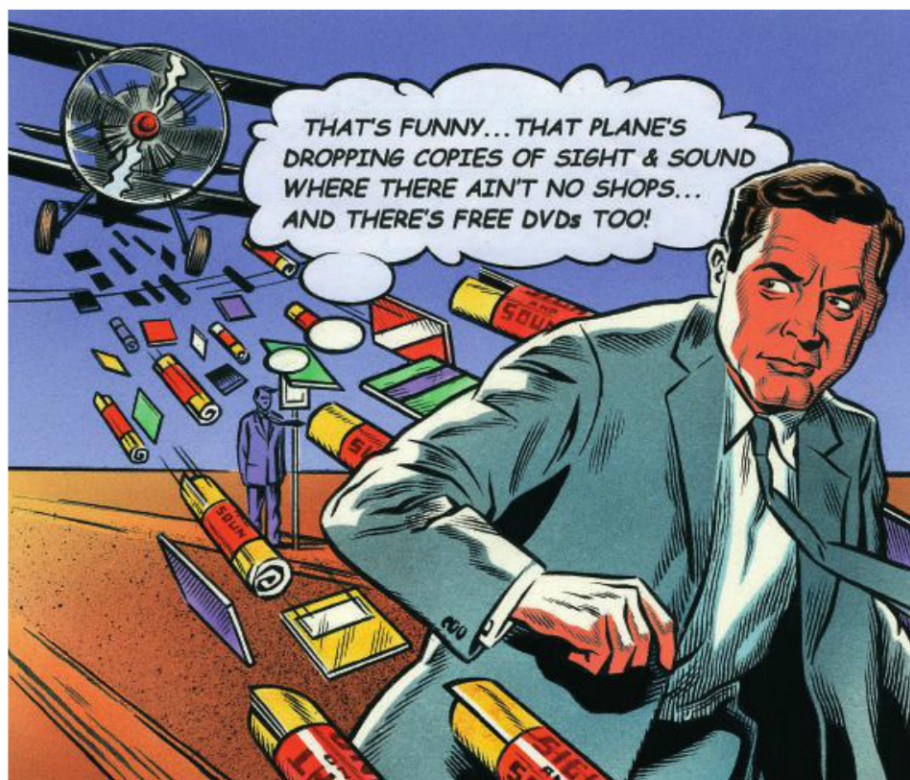
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The death of Franco and the end of dictatorship spawned a remarkable flowering of Spanish cinema at the end of the 1970s. With the revival of Carlos Saura's *'Cría cuervos'*, **Paul Julian Smith** looks back at key films of the era

SPANISH SPRING



BEHIND CLOSED DOORS
With a soulful central performance from Ana Torrent, above and opposite, *'Cría cuervos'* evoked the shut-in mood of Spain in the year of Franco's death

What price cinema after the death of a dictatorship? If all goes well we should soon know how the filmmakers of the Arab Spring – in Tunisia and Egypt, at least – cope with both the bracing winds of freedom and the lengthy legacy of repression. Meanwhile the BFI offers Londoners a season devoted to perhaps the most fruitful and hopeful precedent for current events – called, with unambiguous optimism: 'Good Morning Freedom! Spanish Cinema After Franco'.

The jewel in the crown of the season, rereleased for an extended run, is Carlos Saura's brilliant *Cría cuervos* (1975). Yet it's something of an odd man out. Shot as the dictator lay dying in the autumn of 1975, Saura's subtle and melancholy drama could not be further from the explosion of vitality and festivity that followed – as documented in many of the other films in the season. The Madrid *movida* – an untranslatable term originally derived from drug slang for 'rush' or 'buzz' – was famously an explosion of pent-up cultural energy that expressed itself in multiple media: music, fashion, painting and photography, as well as film. The season includes no fewer than six of the most familiar – and even canonic – texts of the period, namely the early works of Almodóvar.

Yet, belying the stereotype of mindless hedonism still current in Spain when it comes to the *movida*, Almodóvar moves surprisingly swiftly in these films from the crazy and chaotic fun of his first feature *Pepi, Luci, Bom* (*Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón*, 1980) to the tragic and accomplished gay love triangle of *The Law of Desire* (*La ley del deseo*, 1987). It's interesting that the BFI's press ➤



Spanish cinema after Franco

release cites mottos of the *movida* which sound plausible but which I've never heard – such as “*Madrid nunca duerme*” (“Madrid never sleeps”). More famous and typical of the period is the more ominous: “*Madrid me mata*” (“Madrid kills me”).

As in the case of other narcotic-fuelled subcultures (the Warhol demi-monde or British punk), the *movida* did indeed prove fatal to a number of its celebrants, casualties of drugs or, slightly later, Aids. The death of a dictator can leave a heavy – as well as a heady – legacy behind it. And the season, which features some gems now little seen even in Spain itself and otherwise unavailable with English subtitles, reveals a variety of coping strategies from very different directors.

To take three exemplary tactics: art-movie auteurs dealt in memory and fantasy; scrappy populists peddled sex and politics; and *maudit* mavericks immersed themselves in drugs and depression. As we shall see, cineastes explored a common motif that is perhaps surprising in a time that was famous for its festivities (the most notorious party was when Warhol himself briefly lit out from Manhattan for Madrid). That motif is the enclosed house: four walls set against the urgent demands of a changing world outside that had become – all too suddenly – fascinating, challenging, terrifying.

Carlos Saura was of course the ultimate well-established auteur of the period, having enjoyed a lengthy career under the dictatorship stretching back to the neorealist *The Hooligans* (*Los golfos*, 1959) via the brutal allegory of fascism as hunting party, *The Hunt* (*La caza*, 1966). And *Cría cuervos* remains an eloquent and moving testament to the end of that era. Starring dark-eyed child actress Ana Torrent, fresh from her triumph in Víctor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive* (*El espíritu de la colmena*, 1973), the film takes place entirely inside the walled compound of a once-powerful family of the regime, hermetically sealed from the chaotic city beyond it, which registers only as jarring traffic noise. It's an all-female household: traumatised daughters, a mute grandmother, a kindly housekeeper and a chilly aunt.

In the troubling, near-silent prologue, little Ana comes across her father dead in bed after a tryst with an unknown woman. Calmly she takes a glass from his side, washes it in the kitchen and chats with her mother (a heartbreaking performance from Geraldine Chaplin, Saura's long-time personal and artistic partner). What we only learn later is that Ana believes she has killed the patriarch (is Saura citing Spaniards' fantasies of murdering Franco, who also died prosaically in his bed?) – and that her mother has also passed away, a victim of cancer. Ana will prove to be plagued by memories of her loving parent; typically, however, Saura chooses not to give us cues when Ana slips into reverie. Even at a moment of huge and undeniable historical change, fantasy and reality slip and slide over each other, fusing and confusing fact and fiction.

This technique is typical of what has been called the 'Francoist aesthetic'. Faced by harsh and capricious censorship, Spanish filmmakers – chief among them Saura himself – learned from bitter experience to cloak their critique in layers of enigma. So on the one hand, the claustrophobic



and decadent house clearly represents the dying days of the regime. The wheelchair-bound grandmother silently contemplates the family photos that chart her only purchase on the past. A large swimming pool, now drained and derelict, testifies to previous moments of pleasure for the privileged winners of the Civil War. The children dress up as adults, mimicking – unknowingly – the deadly conflicts of their elders. The nine-year-old Ana even gets to play with a gun.

Yet there hints, too, of a more open future – a Spanish Spring, if you like. The grandmother listens to old-fashioned songs by Imperio Argentina, a vital figure for the regime, who even made films in Nazi Germany. But the girls dance instead to ‘Porque te vas’, an incongruous and mindlessly sunny pop ditty by Jeanette, a briefly famous star of the 1970s. Daringly, Saura casts Chaplin in a double role: as the dying mother and as the grown-up Ana, who addresses the camera directly from a point in the distant future where she herself has become an adult.

The moral is, as ever, ambiguous. If mother and daughter are indistinguishable (and Chaplin is as handsomely tormented in both roles, emotion flickering over that luminous face), how can Spain move on? Will it be locked into a cycle of repetition and repression? The proverb cited in the film's title (“Raise ravens and they'll peck out your eyes”) would seem to be pretty clear. Yet by simply positing the possibility of a future – at a time

when many Spaniards feared another Civil War – Saura might be seen as assuring us that life would indeed go on after the death of the dictator, however inconceivable that prospect might have seemed at the time.

Lost in transition

Saura's own future would prove to be problematic. He hit his stride in the 1980s with a trilogy of dance movies (*Blood Wedding*, *Carmen*, *A Love Bewitched*), but subsequently failed to impress either audience or critics with historical epics (*El Dorado*, 1988) or thrillers (*Taxi*, 1996). Compared with other, younger directors in the season – true inheritors of the Spanish Spring – Saura seems to come not just from another decade, but from another century.

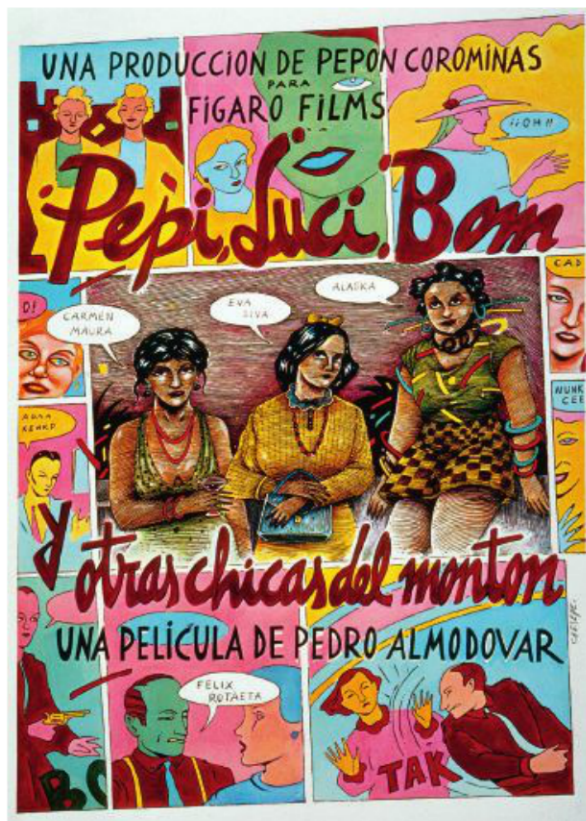
Little known abroad, and almost forgotten in Spain, is Eloy de la Iglesia, an exploitation filmmaker who made pioneering works on two formerly forbidden themes: Basque nationalism and homosexuality. As furiously (and briefly) prolific as Fassbinder, de la Iglesia made no fewer than 20 films during the period known as the ‘Transition’ to democracy. Despised by critics, he won huge audiences for features he himself described as “pamphlets”: scandalous, date-tied chronicles of politics and sex.

Made in 1978 – just three years after *Cría cuervos* – *Confessions of a Congressman* (*El diputado*) is a typically trashy masterpiece. Hero Roberto (played by José Sacristán, the ubiquitous film face of the new Spain) has lived life as a leftist in secret under Franco. Now, with the arrival of democracy, he confronts another kind of existence on the down-low: though happily married and a political candidate, he is drawn to the tempting rent boys who seem to be everywhere in de la Iglesia's vision of a sex-soaked Madrid.

Cheerfully slapdash in technique, and hijacking real-life public figures of the time for cameos, *Confessions of a Congressman* still brings with it a heady whiff of hedonistic times. And its central moral remains relevant today: even in a Spain where gay marriage is now unexceptional, there are vanishingly few out politicians. Cruising in his car (a delirious montage shows a string of interchangeable Pasolini-esque youths), Roberto soon comes to focus on one particular blond angel. But what's striking about the film (which ends as Roberto intends to come out to his homophobic party colleagues) is that the open but perilous pleasures of the street give way to the more sheltered delights of the home. Roberto's accommodating wife, a truly modern woman of the period, is happy to welcome the boy into her marriage; and the most scandalous scene (echoed by a triple kiss on the original poster) is a sexy three-way between the middle-aged politician, his well-groomed spouse and the barely legal blond boy.

Here Saura's decaying fascist mansion has been replaced by the fashionable bourgeois home in which progressive leftists can enjoy – unseen –

Art-movie auteurs dealt in memory and fantasy, and *maudit* mavericks immersed themselves in drugs



MAN OF THE MOMENT While 'Pepi, Luci, Bom' launched a long-lasting career for Almodóvar, the directors of other sensations of the day, 'Rapture' ('Arrebato') and 'Confessions of a Congressman' ('El diputado'), burned out fast

their newly transgressive pleasures. And the subtle exploration of memory and fantasy could play no role in an era named for the *destape* – a Spanish word meaning literally ‘uncovering’ or ‘revealing’, but used for the disrobing of the young bodies now ubiquitous in the new Spanish cinema. It was a trend for which the populist de la Iglesia, a lone pioneer of male frontal nudity, was notorious.

Transgressive aesthetics

Unlike Carlos Saura, whose career has spanned 50 years (and who is still going strong at 79), the briefly prolific de la Iglesia soon sank into silence, dogged by the drugs that feature so heavily in his films. Yet another director featured in the season, Iván Zulueta, met a similar fate after his extraordinary and little-seen feature *Rapture* (*Arrebato*, 1980). It would be quite possible to imagine an alternative universe in which it was not Almodóvar but the maverick Zulueta who had become the dominant auteur of post-Franco cinema. After all, Almodóvar's *Pepi, Luci, Bom* is – however cheerfully vibrant – a hot mess of a film; released the same year, *Rapture* is by contrast surprisingly accomplished in both its narrative and technique.

The two novice auteurs seem to have had much in common: a taste for transgressive aesthetics and thematics; a love of genre film and pop culture; and a lack of concern for politics – at least in its parliamentary form, still new in Spain. They also shared an interest in transmedia: Almodóvar had experience in print and *fotonovela*, Zulueta a background in television and graphic art – especially the movie posters that would prove to be his most enduring medium. The two directors even shared actors: of the two stars of *Rapture*, Eusebio Poncela would go on to play a very similar part, also as a filmmaker, in *The Law of Desire*, while Cecilia Roth, after a

cameo in *Pepi, Luci, Bom*, would star again for Almodóvar in *Labyrinth of Passion* (*Laberinto de pasiones*, 1982). One lip-synching scene in *Rapture* when Roth channels Betty Boop – a scene that's at once charming and alarming, a combination typical of Zulueta's film – prefigures so much in Almodóvar's films to come.

Known as the definitive cult film of the *movida*, *Rapture* charts the weird cinematic romance – a threesome once again – between a genre director (Poncela's José, shown cutting a vampire flick in the opening sequence), his junky lover (Roth's Ana, turned on to heroin by her boyfriend) and a reclusive super-8 filmmaker named Pedro (played by the little known and surely pseudonymous Will More), who invites the couple to his bizarre country estate. José is first seen driving along an infernal Gran Vía (Madrid's Broadway), glowing with the movie posters of picture palaces (now sadly closed) to the accompaniment of Wagner – Zulueta's precursor in terms of rhapsodic excess.

In José's chaotic apartment, whose lighting glows ruby red, Ana is sprawled on the bed, all luscious scarlet lips and furry high-heeled mules. The sound design features sirens and alarms, proper to a city of extremes. We are then treated to fetishistic close-ups of shooting up heroin, with addicts' skin tinged an unearthly lavender. This casual drug use is matched by equally casual nudity (both male and female) typical of the *destape*. But what's specific to Zulueta is this theme of the rapture of addiction, to which his title alludes. It is a double addiction, to both heroin and to celluloid.

The film is structured around the hazy chronology of addiction (characters ask each other “when was it?” that an event took place) and an equally blurry, druggy geography (a trip from

nearby Segovia to Madrid is compared to a space flight from Venus to Pluto). And in the final section, when Pedro has relocated to a sterile modern apartment building in the capital to practise his cinematic obsession, film will be reduced to the minimalism of the avant garde: rhyming with Poncela's blood-red shirt, Pedro's footage has become a strip of all-red celluloid, except for a single frame that starts into life.

It's a long way in a short time – just five years – from Saura's shuttered house, echoing with fantasy and memory, to Zulueta's equally hermetic apartment, immersed in drugs and depression. And on that brief, intense journey, de la Iglesia, among others, had shown with new and fragile urgency the unaccustomed power of sex and politics – of sex in politics – in a young democracy.

Perhaps ‘Good Morning Freedom!’ is too optimistic a slogan for the films of the period; in Spain the legacy of repression proved difficult to slough off, as perhaps it will prove in the Arab world. But, as Saura knew full well when in *Cría cuervos* he had Geraldine Chaplin address us so solemnly from the uncertain world of the future, the bracing winds of freedom include the freedom to choose self-destruction. This was the road taken by de la Iglesia and Zulueta – a road so different to the better-known and richly creative self-promotion of Almodóvar. As this season reveals, Spanish cinema after Franco would thus prove – perhaps inevitably so – richer, stranger and more incorrigibly ambivalent than the dictator's orphaned subjects could possibly have imagined.

■ ‘Cría cuervos’ is rereleased on 10 June at BFI Southbank, London and cinemas nationwide. The season ‘Good Morning Freedom! – Spanish Cinema After Franco’ runs until 30 June at BFI Southbank



SCENES FROM A MARRIAGE

Viewing Iran's social problems through the prism of a troubled marriage, 'A Separation' won the Golden Bear at Berlin this year. **James Bell** talks to its director, Asghar Farhadi

We first meet Nader and Simin, the middle-class couple at the centre of Iranian director Asghar Farhadi's fifth feature *A Separation* (*Jodaeiye Nader az Simin*), in a colourless Tehran courtroom, the drab surroundings amplifying their fraught exchange. Both are looking directly at the camera, so from the very beginning of the film we the audience are put in the position of the judge, called upon to give our verdict on their motives and actions.

The couple have come for a hearing on a divorce that neither of them much wants, but circumstance has forced. Simin (Leila Hatami) wants to move abroad to bring up their ten-year-old daughter Termeh (Sarina Farhadi), arguing that circumstances in Iran aren't right for raising a female child. Nader (Peyman Moadi), though stubborn and fatally proud, is in the words of his wife "a good man", and not an uncaring one – but he won't leave Iran because his elderly father, ravaged by debilitating Alzheimer's, needs constant care. "Does he even know you're his son?" Simin asks. "I know he's my father," Nader replies.

As Simin's anxieties about raising a child in Iran suggest, Farhadi's film (which he also scripted) is less interested in probing the intricate emotions of a fracturing marriage than in using that situation to question the ethical and moral dilemmas and issues of class and religion that face Iranians today. It's the need to provide care for Nader's elderly father that brings this middle-class couple into contact with Razieh and Hodjat (Sareh Bayat and Shahab Hosseini), a devout but financially struggling couple from Tehran's lower classes. Nader employs Razieh to look after his father – a position that causes her personal conflict, since caring for a man raises awkward religious questions, and she has not told her husband what she is doing. When Nader's father soils himself on her first day, Razieh calls an Islamic advice helpline to check if she is permitted to see him naked. Such religious questions are more important for her than they are for the comparatively secular and liberal Nader and Simin – just one of the many 'separations' in Iranian society alluded to by the film's title.

Conflict arises when one day Nader returns home to find that Razieh has gone out, leaving the old man tied to the bed. When Razieh eventually returns, Nader furiously throws her out, accusing her of stealing money into the bargain – an allegation that upsets the devout woman far more than the accusation that she has failed in her duty of care. As she is pushed out of the apartment, Razieh falls; the next thing we learn is that she was pregnant and has now lost the baby. This may or may not be as a result of Nader's actions; but as the unborn baby was over 19 weeks, Nader finds himself accused of murder, and the film plunges us further into gripping drama.

A Separation shifts our sympathies between the various characters, but without ever allowing us to draw simple conclusions. No character is given the moral high ground – except perhaps for the daughter Termeh who, as witness to her parents' sometimes dishonest actions, emerges as the film's moral centre. (She's played by the director's own daughter.) Farhadi's balanced position brings to mind Jean Renoir's famous comment: "The real hell of life is that everyone has his reasons."

Farhadi's film is superbly acted by its ensemble of actors, a fact recognised at this year's Berlin Film Festival, where the film's female cast shared the best actress award, while the men shared best actor. Farhadi's film also took the festival's Golden Bear – a prize that carried added poignancy because it was awarded by a jury that should have included Farhadi's fellow director Jafar Panahi, who was unable to travel because he had been imprisoned by the Iranian government.

James Bell: What provided your original inspiration for 'A Separation'? Was it based on actual events?

Asghar Farhadi: Inspiration came from many places, but I really see the film as a continuation of the themes I looked at in my earlier films [which include *About Elly*, seen at the London Film Festival in 2009]. Particular images had an influence on me – for instance, somebody told me about seeing a man washing his elderly, ill father at a public baths. That image really stuck in my head, and suggested a starting point.

Separation is not something I've experienced myself, but in writing about the relationship between the father Nader and the daughter Termeh I did draw on my own experience – that's something very personal.

JB: In your film, every character has their own reasons for acting as they do, and you're careful not to allow anyone the moral high ground. In the opening scene, for instance, we see Nader and Simin in the divorce court facing the camera equally.

AF: The camera is placed where the judge would sit, because I don't want the audience passively to just watch the characters. It's up to the audience to judge them, to decide whether someone is at fault or not, or if somebody is being treated unfairly.

JB: The title refers to more than just the couple's separation: there's the division between classes, between secular and religious aspects of society, liberal and reactionary points of view, men and women, and so on.

AF: Yes, and there are even more divisions – between father and daughter, for instance. But the main separation – the most important in Iranian society – is that between the different classes. A lot of people in Iran today lean towards a modern way of life, yet there are those who are more traditional, who want to go back to a mythical olden day. For the middle classes it's more to do with individual freedoms. Class is where the real struggle lies. It's turning into a hidden war.

JB: How much have the restrictions on individual freedoms affected you? I understand that the Iranian authorities halted production temporarily following some comments you made about Iranian directors having to work abroad.

AF: Yes, at an awards ceremony where I was being honoured for my earlier films, I commented that I wished some of my fellow directors who had moved abroad could have been there with me. The government didn't like me mentioning their names in public, so the production was halted for a week.

JB: At various points you show Nader giving his daughter Termeh moral lessons, but our scepticism about his motives for doing so grows. Is he sincere, or is he simply passing the responsibility for telling the truth on to her? If so, should we read that as a comment on his generation's failings towards Iranian youth?

AF: Beyond the moral lessons given by Nader to Termeh, there's the bigger question: what role does morality play? How do we measure morality, and on what basis can we say whether an action or



decision is just or not? When I'm asked why I don't divide my characters into good and bad people, my answer is to ask what measurement I should use to divide them?

JB: How closely did your finished script match the film on screen?

AF: We did stick closely to the script. Yet the rehearsal period is very important for me, and I give a lot of time to it. As we got more and more into it, I did make changes.

JB: You've worked a lot in theatre. Does the importance you give to rehearsal come out of that experience?

AF: Yes, to a certain extent – which isn't to say that my films are particularly theatrical. In my method of working, if the actor is right for the role, the acting will come out well. The first thing I look for is intelligence. The second thing is that I try to find a commonality between the character and the actor's personality.



MARRIAGE, IRANIAN STYLE

The lives of Simin, top left, and Nader, top right, become entwined with those of Razieh, above right, the woman who cares for Nader's elderly father

The camera is placed where the judge would sit. I don't want the audience to just watch the characters. It's up to the audience to judge them

JB: The film has a real immediacy – we're right up close to the characters. How did you work with cinematographer Mahmood Kalari to achieve that?

AF: Everything was shot on location apart from the scenes in the judge's room in the court. We weren't granted permission to shoot there, so we had to build the set in an old school building. I wanted the audience to feel they were there in the room with the actors. In editing the film, I tried to give the characters the same amount of screen time, and we also tried to keep the same distance between the camera and the actors, so you don't get especially close to one character over another.

JB: You're attentive to issues faced by Iranian women.

AF: I wouldn't say I have an acute understanding of Iranian women, it's just that I know and understand the society I've grown up in. In any case, the problems faced by women and men tend to be intertwined. But in Iran it is women who face the biggest struggle to reclaim the rights they've been deprived of. Western audiences seem to have a partial view of Iranian women, seeing them as passive and shut out of society. In reality, despite the restrictions put on them, most women are highly present and active in Iranian society. In the characters of Razieh and Simin I wanted to show both kinds of woman, without proclaiming or condemning either as heroine or victim. They are two clashing visions of the good, and this is the modern tragedy.

JB: Do you primarily have an Iranian audience in mind when you're making a film?

AF: The first thing I do is imagine myself as the audience. I don't really differentiate between an Iranian audience and an international audience, because the concerns are largely the same. It's possibly easier for an Iranian audience to have a more complex and complete reaction to this film, simply because they will get the nuances of the language, and recognise the social context. But at heart the story is about a married couple, and that situation is not specific to any place or culture. Having said that, I've always endeavoured to make every film seeable by my countrymen in Iran. If I thought the film was one they wouldn't be able to see, then I wouldn't make it.

JB: Is that becoming harder to ensure, with stricter censorship in Iran?

AF: It does make things more difficult. But because I've been brought up in this society – and have seen censorship everywhere – I know how to work within it. In Iran censorship is more ideological and political, but that doesn't mean there isn't censorship of a different kind in the West. My way of dealing with it is, rather than put a message in my film, I raise a question – because if it's a question, you're unlikely to get censored.

■ 'A Separation' is released on 1 July, and is reviewed on page 77

BREAKING THE VASE

With trademark iconoclasm, director François Ozon has turned a 30-year-old stage comedy into a riot of 1970s kitsch – with very contemporary political resonance.
Ginette Vincendeau savours 'Potiche'



François Ozon has done it again. Like *8 Women* (*8 femmes*) in 2002, his new film *Potiche* has hit the right note both with audiences (more than 2 million admissions in France) and critics on the festival circuit. Like *8 Women*, too, *Potiche* turns that most un-hip genre, the boulevard play, into a glittering, witty piece of postmodern filmmaking, blessed with a wonderful cast headed by those enduring icons of French cinema, Catherine Deneuve and Gérard Depardieu. But where *8 Women* could justifiably be accused of vacuity – of being all surface and no depth – *Potiche* combines its feminist (and queer) message with sharp political satire.

First produced in 1980 at the Théâtre Antoine in Paris, *Potiche* was written by two stalwarts of the genre, Pierre Barillet and Jean-Pierre Grédy, as a vehicle for comic stage actress Jacqueline Maillan. Boulevard plays – and their filmic adaptations – are normally below the radar of most critics, seen as passé, escapist and conservative. Yet this comic genre, if hardly radical, has always accommodated moments of social and political insight. In the case of the original *Potiche*, this was enhanced by the post-May 68 meshing of political concerns with popular genres. *Potiche* is imbued with the period's agendas, in particular feminist struggles and labour unrest.

In a small town in the industrial north of France, Suzanne Pujol (Maillan in the play, Deneuve in the film) is the eponymous *potiche* (literally, a vase). That is to say she is a decorative, frivolous but also neglected bourgeois housewife, married to Robert (Fabrice Luchini), a bad-tempered womaniser. So far, so typically boulevard. But when violent confrontation with his workers forces Robert to step down from his job as head of an umbrella factory, the suggestion that Suzanne should temporarily take his place provokes guffaws all round. Yet, as rapidly becomes clear, not only does the *potiche* enjoy her new role, but she's also very good at it. She sorts out the strikes, boosts sales and acquires a majority stake in the business, while in parallel revealing that her (married) youth was every bit as misspent as that of her husband (one of her many lovers being Maurice Babin, the Communist mayor of the town played by Depardieu in the film) – all this to the shock or delight of her entourage. The story ends with Suzanne running for election as an MP. Having sorted out her house and company, why not France too?

Ozon's adaptation updates the original play in ways that are both predictable and unexpected. He condenses some of the more verbose moments and adds flashbacks and a coda; and whereas the play takes place entirely in the Pujol sitting room, we now roam through her house – and into the woods

where Suzanne does her jogging, the Badaboum nightclub where she goes dancing with Babin, and the workshops, offices and boardroom of the Pujol factory. This enables Ozon to treat us to some classic 1970s design, featuring a riot of orange armchairs, brown and yellow wallpapers and the avocado plates that Deneuve takes out of the dishwasher. But beyond such visual fireworks, Ozon's adaptation is interestingly ambiguous in terms of its take on the sexual politics of the story.

Ozon's feminist stance has been a matter of debate. His provocative early films both confronted homosexuality head-on – as in *Une robe d'été* (*A Summer Dress*, 1996) – and exhibited a troubling misogyny, as in *Criminal Lovers* (*Les Amants criminels*, 1999). Closer to *Potiche* are his better-known features that focus on mature women – as played by Charlotte Rampling in *Under the Sand* (*Sous le sable*, 2000) and *Swimming Pool* (2002), and Isabelle Huppert, Fanny Ardant and Deneuve in *8 Women*. Those films clearly display sympathy for their female heroines and fetishise their beauty, while marginalising or even eliminating men; but they also dwell pruriently on female misery and ageing (*Under the Sand* and *Swimming Pool*) and endless female rivalry (*8 Women*). As Deneuve so aptly put it, "I am not sure Ozon likes women, but he likes actresses."

Although *Under the Sand* and *Swimming Pool* had contemporary settings, their heroines were somehow removed from everyday concerns, while *8 Women* inhabited a make-believe 1950s filtered through cinematic references. *Potiche* is also set in the past (1977, to be specific), yet it addresses contemporary issues by linking its mature heroine to the feminist struggles of her time. But does this make it a feminist film?

The pleasure of *Potiche*, play or film, derives from its classic comic devices of inversion and exaggeration: the downtrodden female becomes the carnivalesque figure of the 'woman on top'. Ozon charts Suzanne's liberation from her grotesquely macho husband (hilariously played by Luchini), whose attitudes are summed up when he asks her: "Do you have an opinion? All I'm asking is for you to share mine." She is efficient at work, tames the unions, seduces Babin again and amazes her children: both her daughter Joëlle (Judith Godrèche), who was the first to call her a *potiche*, and her awestruck son Laurent (Jérémy Renier), who comments, "You are going with the flow of history. Everywhere women are seizing power." Ozon even enhances the conversion of Robert's secretary and former mistress Nadège (the splendid Karin Viard) from a silly airhead to an enlightened woman who learns to value female solidarity; as she puts it, "I am a new woman, thanks to [Suzanne]. I will not be *potiche* number two."



OFF THE SHELF
In the new film from François Ozon, below, housewife Suzanne (Catherine Deneuve, all pics) is neglected by her sexist husband (Fabrice Luchini, opposite) and has an affair with Communist mayor Gérard Depardieu (top)



In 'Potiche' Ozon has the nerve to show Deneuve, the emblem of French elegance, in rollers and tracksuit

◀ Ozon's adaptation also moves with the times by giving Suzanne more power. While the play ends with her deciding to run for election, here we see Suzanne campaigning and then beating Babin. Interestingly, though, it undermines her in other ways. The play has a clear upward trajectory – Suzanne overcomes all obstacles and Robert truly gets his comeuppance. In the film, by contrast, Suzanne is betrayed by her daughter and loses her majority stake in the company. And while the play concludes with a happy ending within the bounds of its own theatrical realism, the film's ending suddenly shifts registers, with Deneuve breaking into song – as if to rob her of the reality of this victory (which, after all, is much more plausible in 2010 than it would have been in 1977).

But it's in the portrayal of the younger generation that the film's sexual politics seem both more up-to-date – and more ambivalent. In a complete departure from the play, Laurent abandons his fiancée and switches his affection to a young man, Jean-François (Yannick Schmitz), thus cleverly 'queering' the play's typical adultery plot. Previously Robert had told Suzanne that his son's fiancée was his half-sister (he had slept with her mother); in Ozon's new twist, the viewer (but not Laurent) knows that Jean-François's father was Suzanne's lover – and thus the two young men may be half-brothers. Ozon also incorporates affectionately self-conscious gay stereotypes: once liberated from his father's oppression, Laurent's artistic talent flourishes and he designs a "rainbow collection" of umbrellas (a nod to Jacques Demy's *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*).

Laurent's greater liberation, however, is balanced by a darkening of the character of his sister Joëlle, who betrays her mother in order to save her own marriage – and is pregnant because she refuses the now available contraception. Joëlle is also the mouthpiece for the most reactionary politics in the film. In particular, she convinces her father – now back at the helm, thanks to her – that the future lies in destroying unions, cutting the local work force and relocating to Tunisia. The latter – anachronistic – detail also shows Ozon attempting to politicise the play for a contemporary French audience.

Barillet and Grédy's original play echoed the era of political disillusion that followed May 68 – the era when the hopes of the *événements* gave way to a decade of discontent under conservative presidents Georges Pompidou and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. Giscard in particular presided over the end of the economic boom of the *trente glorieuses* (the 30 years between 1945 and 1975), the shift to an advanced capitalist, technocratic era and the beginning of the end of old-style class struggle – as symbolised by Babin.

Ozon adeptly mixes this background with references to the current Sarkozy era. During a row with Babin, Robert bellows: "If workers want to win, they'll have to work more" – echoing Sarkozy's infamous campaign slogan "work more to earn more". But if Ozon here nails his colours to the left-wing, anti-Sarkozy mast, the politics of his film are elsewhere ambivalent: for example the trade unionists (entirely his addition) are uniformly ugly, unpleasant and stupid.

Pierre Barillet admitted that the main character of *Potiche* was inspired by Bernadette Chirac, wife of the future president of the Republic – who had said on her husband Jacques's election as Mayor of Paris in 1977 that she had no intention of being a *potiche*. In Ozon's film, Deneuve's Suzanne starts out as a Mme Chirac lookalike, complete with lacquered hair and mumsy outfits; but her gradual transformation into a more glamorous (and Deneuve-like) figure brings her closer to several real-life contemporary French female politicians – and in particular to Ségolène Royal, the Socialist candidate who ran against Sarkozy in the 2007 presidential election. Royal is comically alluded to when Deneuve tries some farmer's goat's cheese during her campaign. (Royal's constituency is in the Poitou area, famous for its goat's cheese, of which she has been a great champion.) But more generally, Suzanne's trajectory recalls Royal's political rise – a genealogy clearly acknowledged by Ozon, who has said he was shocked by Sarkozy's misogyny towards his rival candidate: "I didn't know in what direction to take [the play]. And then, during the presidential campaign, its connections with contemporary events suddenly seemed obvious to me... The play was no longer outdated."

If the last ten years have seen a rise in political auteur films in France (eg the work of Laurent Cantet and Robert Guédiguian), *Potiche* belongs to a new wave of more mainstream political cinema, including such recent films as *Starko!* (2008), *Mammuth* (2010), *Le Nom des gens* (2010) and the recent high-profile *La Conquête* (2011).

The new Truffaut?

But it's not simply the transformation of characters and situations that makes *Potiche* – for all its apparently outmoded raw material – such a contemporary film; it's also the identity of its director. Where the play worked entirely within the cultural space of the stereotypically French boulevard theatre, the film operates on an international stage, and at the crossroads of auteur and popular cinema.

Potiche's ability to attract a global audience has apparently taken French film circles by surprise – it was thought that its genre and topic were 'too French'. The film's €3.5 million in overseas sales, however, confirms Ozon as one of the most bank-

able French directors abroad (following high box-office revenues for *Under the Sand*, *8 Women* and *Swimming Pool*). Of course, it's precisely the film's Frenchness that sells so well – its situations (what could be more French than a combination of adultery and strikes?) and stars (Deneuve and Depardieu) packaged in Ozon's signature playful style. By telling contrast, his English-speaking *Angel* (2006) did much less well. Vincent Maraval – head of overseas sales at the French film company Wild Bunch, who co-produced *Potiche* – puts it this way: "He fits exactly what overseas audiences who like French cinema require; they don't want action films but comedies that are both ironic and sincere."

That mixture of ironic and sincere is exactly what Ozon – more than in the pervasively theatrical *8 Women* – has pulled off with *Potiche*. In part this is to do with the use of Deneuve – as well as having the nerve to show the emblem of French elegance in rollers and tracksuit. Compared to Jacqueline Maillan shamelessly hamming it up in the play (and its 1983 TV broadcast), Deneuve's performance works on a double edge of artifice and sincerity. Depardieu's relatively marginal performance in *Potiche* can only induce deep nostalgia for a once fabulous actor; by comparison Deneuve's is more of a crowning glory. But the casting of the pair (harking back to their previous appearances together in films such as Truffaut's 1979 *The Last Metro*) seems like an expression of cinephilia on Ozon's part, pinpointed in the poignant moment when a heart-shaped locket reveals photos of both stars in their glorious youth.

Ozon's success as a director owes much to his versatility – his alternation of personal and 'difficult' projects (for instance 2004's 5x2 or 2009's decidedly odd 'social fantasy' *Ricky*) with classy, sophisticated entertainment. This has had French critics reaching for comparisons, from the "new Claude Chabrol" and the "new Polanski", to "our own Almodóvar". Certainly, Ozon's critique of the bourgeois family – from *Sitcom* (1998) to *Potiche* – is Chabrolesque; his willingness to tackle 'shocking' subjects recalls Polanski, and his overt treatment of homosexuality, Almodóvar.

But Maraval is surely nearer the mark with his characterisation of Ozon as "a new François Truffaut" in his combination of "regular quality with shifting registers" – as well as in his trajectory from early iconoclasm to mainstream success, and his talent for channelling personal, authorial concerns while capturing *l'air du temps* through adaptations of other people's work. *Potiche* may be based on a fusty 1980 play, but it is absolutely a film of today, by a filmmaker of today.

■ *'Potiche'* is released on 17 June, and is reviewed on page 73

A LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP

Looked down on by critics, France's boulevard theatre continues to inspire filmmakers. By **Ginette Vincendeau**

It takes some nerve today for a 'cool' French filmmaker to adapt a boulevard play, as François Ozon has done with *Potiche*. The theatrical genre has long been despised by the French cinema establishment, and yet it has formed a consistently rich and varied source of material for French films, while also influencing their visual style. Boulevard theatre owes its name to the Boulevard du Temple in Paris – and more generally the *grands boulevards* – where theatres clustered from the second half of the 18th century, and where many can still be found. The 'genre' refers to popular plays, mostly comedies that have their roots in the theatre of Marivaux and the vaudevilles (in the French sense, meaning a farce, sometimes with songs) of Georges Feydeau, Eugène Labiche and Georges Courteline.

In the 20th century, French boulevard theatre remained lively, with the works of Sacha Guitry, Marcel Pagnol, Marcel Achard, Tristan Bernard, Robert de Flers and Gaston Arman de Caillavet, and – among many others – Pierre Barillet and Jean-Pierre Grédy, the authors of *Potiche*. The plays are solidly structured, middlebrow pieces of comic entertainment with middle-class settings and themes. A la Feydeau, the plots show a predilection for adultery, comic misunderstandings and bomb-shell revelations, all delivered in trademark witty dialogue. Despite boulevard theatre's reputation for superficiality, the plays often mock institutions such as the army or educational establishments, and any form of pomposity generally.

A few silent French films were based on boulevard plays, but the coming of sound saw a veritable avalanche of adaptations – almost a third of French films in the first half of the 1930s. This provoked heated debates that pitted the defenders of 'pure cinema', spearheaded by René Clair, against the partisans of 'canned theatre' (as its enemies called it), led by Marcel Pagnol. The Marseille playwright adapted his own works for cinema, to huge success – for instance 1931's *Marius*. Others followed suit, such as Louis Verneuil and Jacques Deval. But their king was Sacha Guitry, with films such as *Faisons un rêve* (1936) and *Quadrille* (1937) that met with critical consternation and box-office triumph.

These adaptations had important consequences for the aesthetics of French cinema, privileging dialogue, ensemble framing and flamboyant performances by the likes of Raimu, Jules Berry, Edwige Feuillère and Arletty. But if this tradition was – and still is – contrasted negatively with 'superior' dramatic cinema based on original scripts, very few filmmakers have escaped its influence altogether, given its



OUT OF THE CLOSET
'La Cage aux folles', above, and 'Le Dîner de cons', below, both started out as plays before becoming hit French movies (and later Hollywood remakes)

pervasive place in the culture. It is not often remarked, for example, that Jean Renoir adapted several such plays in the late 1920s and early 1930s: *Tire au flanc* (1928), *On purge bébé* (1931), *Chotard et Cie* (1932) and most famously *Boudu Saved from Drowning* (1932). Typically the failures (eg *Chotard*) are blamed on the plays, while the successes, in particular *Boudu*, are seen as Renoir 'transcending' the original material.

The 1930s were the heyday of boulevard-play adaptations, though they continued under German occupation – and of course the best-known film of the period, *Les Enfants du paradis* (1945), is about the Boulevard du Temple theatre itself. During the 1950s, mainstream genres evolved to make way for different kinds of comedies, as well as the *policier* and the costume film, although prominent film directors still had recourse to boulevard theatre for their source material – for example Claude Autant-Lara with the Feydeau classic *Occupe-toi d'Amélie* (1949) and Henri-Georges Clouzot in his sole comic effort, *Miquette et sa mère* (1949, based on a play by Caillavet and de Flers).

The coming of the New Wave and François Truffaut's assault on French 'tradition of quality' cinema might have been expected to sound the death knell for boulevard-play adaptations. Yet while

the 1960s and 1970s did indeed privilege naturalistic, political auteur films, what we might call 'boulevard cinema' did not die, and has survived to the present day in a number of forms.

A new generation of mainstream playwrights took up where their elders left off, feeding into some of the most successful French comic films of the last decades – for instance Jean Poiret's *La Cage aux folles*, filmed by Edouard Molinaro in 1978, and more recently *Le Dîner de cons*, written and directed by Francis Veber in 1998. (Both were big enough hits to warrant Hollywood remakes.) In a different vein, auteur filmmakers have drawn on such popular texts and adapted them to their own ends: Agnès Jaoui and Jean-Pierre Bacri reworked their play *Un air de famille* for cinema (directed by Cédric Klapisch in 1996), before becoming established as filmmakers in their own right with *Le Goût des autres* (2000). The veteran Alain Resnais, meanwhile, has frequently adapted French popular theatre (not to mention Alan Ayckbourn), most recently with *Pas sur la bouche* (2003).

Meanwhile it should be said that 'straight' filmed boulevard plays continue to be popular on French television, whether *Potiche* itself in 1983, or Feydeau's *Un fil à la patte*, staged this year at the Comédie Française and broadcast in April. The genre also continues to thrive on stage in Paris, where a roster of film stars can be seen, including veterans of the calibre of Jean-Paul Belmondo in the 1990s (who even acquired his own boulevard theatre, the Théâtre des Variétés) and Alain Delon this year. Highbrow critics may despise the genre – its obsolescence is often decried – yet clearly there is still a lot of life in boulevard theatre and the cinema it fuels – as *Potiche*, for one, demonstrates.



ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННЫЙ ФИЛЬМ
НЕБО ЗОВЕТ

Сценарий
Василия
Григорьевича
Харитоновича
Васильева
Режиссер
Василий
Григорьевич
Харитонович

А. САЛОНОВ, Е. ТИМОЩЕНКО
П.А. ГРИГОРЬЕВ, А. ЛЕВЧЕНКО
Г. КОЛЕСОВ, М. СЕРГЕЕВ
ОЛЕГОВ КИЛЬМЕНКО
ЮРИЙ ШЕВЦОВ
М. ШЕВЦОВ
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Композиторский состав

Музыка
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Композиторский состав
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Роль исполняют

В. ПЕРВАНОВ, А. ШОШОВ, А. БУРТАБАКОВ, Г. ТИМОШЕНКО, А. КОЛЕСОВ

В. ПЕРВАНОВ, А. ШОШОВ, А. БУРТАБАКОВ, Г. ТИМОШЕНКО, А. КОЛЕСОВ
В. ПЕРВАНОВ, А. ШОШОВ, А. БУРТАБАКОВ, Г. ТИМОШЕНКО, А. КОЛЕСОВ
Продюсеры картины: М. А. В. Давыдов, М. А.

BRAVE NEW WORLDS
'Cosmic Voyage' (1936),
right, and 'The Call of
the Heavens' (1960),
opposite, show bold
cosmonauts exporting
communist values to
outer space



RED SKIES

SOVIET SCIENCE FICTION

*From heroic propagandist tales of space exploration to post-apocalyptic dystopias of the Chernobyl era, the history of Soviet sci-fi from the 1920s to the 1980s mirrors the rise and fall of the USSR itself. **James Blackford** probes the lost world unveiled in a new BFI season*

Western histories of Soviet and Russian cinema have typically focused either on significant movements – the early revolutionary cinema of the 1920s – or recognised auteurs such as Eisenstein, Tarkovsky and Sokurov. While this has led to the formation of a very useful canon of Russian ‘greats’, it has also meant that our understanding of Russian and Soviet cinema remains limited, with the bulk of a mammoth national production largely obscured from view.

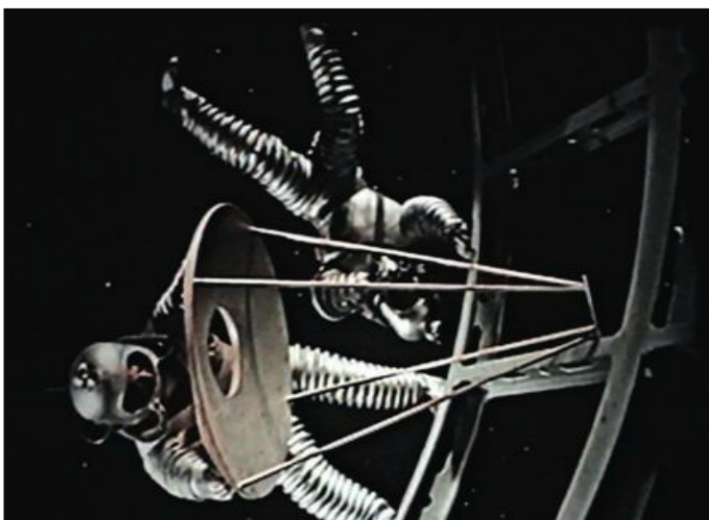
Beyond the established canon, the Soviet era threw up a thriving and diverse genre cinema taking in comedies, musicals, historical epics, sci-fi, war films and even ‘Red westerns’. Once difficult to see, the hidden history of this lesser-known, more populist cinema is now being revealed. DVD editions are available to import, obscure oddities are illicitly streamed on YouTube, and Mosfilm (Russia’s largest and oldest studio) has made much of its library available to view online, free of charge and mostly subtitled. Now, on the

50th anniversary of Yuri Gagarin’s momentous first space flight, BFI Southbank has programmed a season that probes the unexplored byways of Soviet science fiction.

Although not a prolific genre by Hollywood standards, pre-perestroika Russian sci-fi offers a fascinating body of films – a fantastic voyage from early constructivist epics to post-apocalyptic dystopias, taking in prophetic moon explorations, space-race propaganda, atomic war allegories and existential art cinema. An ideologically charged genre, Soviet sci-fi can be read as charting the rise and fall of communism behind the iron curtain, with the wide-eyed optimism of space fantasies made in the early years giving way to damning post-Chernobyl nuclear nightmares as the Soviet bloc crumbled from within.

The first Soviet science-fiction film has its roots in Russia’s rich tradition of sci-fi literature: Yakov Protazanov’s *Aelita, Queen of Mars* (1924) was adapted from a play written by Alexei Tolstoy, a popular writer of historical and science-fiction novels. In post-revolution Moscow, a daydreaming radio engineer receives a mysterious radio

Soviet science fiction



END OF A DREAM
Clockwise from above:
'Visitor to a Museum'
(1989), 'Toward
Meeting a Dream'
(1963), 'Letters from
a Dead Man' (1986),
'Road to the Stars'
(1957)

ALIEN TERRITORY
In 'Planet of Storms',
aka 'Planeta Bura'
(1962), right,
cosmonauts dice with
death on Venus, while
'Kin-Dza-Dza' (1986),
far right, satirises a
distant planet's society

message, prompting him to fantasise about building a spaceship and travelling to a totalitarian Martian empire, where he leads a revolution of the enslaved proletariat. One of the first films about space travel (albeit in its protagonist's imagination), *Aelita* is memorable for its elaborate depiction of Mars in the constructivist style, with distinctive sets and costumes by designer Alexandra Exter. It was an influence on Fritz Lang's subsequent *Metropolis* (1927) and *Woman in the Moon* (*Frau im Mond*, 1929), but more importantly it begins an enduring theme within Soviet sci-fi of using space films as a vehicle for communist ideology.

The same brand of affirmative propaganda persists in the next Soviet sci-fi production, Vasili Zhuravlyov's *Cosmic Voyage* (*Kosmicheskii reys: Fantasticheskaya novella*, 1936), in which we're shown the glistening utopian Soviet future of 1946. A silent film, it charts the Moscow Institute for Interplanetary Travel's first manned expedition to the moon aboard the СССР 1 – Josef Stalin, led by the unexpected trio of an elderly professor, a young woman and a boy. Made on the recommendation of the Komsomol (the Communist Union of Youth) to inspire interest in space studies, and supervised by the Soviet rocket scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, *Cosmic Voyage* features pioneering special effects and miniatures designed by Fodor Krasne, who had honed his skills on a Marxist adaptation of *Gulliver's Travels* (*Novyy Gulliver*, 1935). Here he creates a detailed and futur-

istic miniature Moscow, traversed by the camera in slow, deliberate tracking shots. In one meticulously staged bravura sequence, the camera crawls around a giant hangar housing two huge spacecraft full of tiny animated vehicles and people while, once on the moon, the astronauts leap between giant rocks in carefully crafted stop-motion animation sequences. As it turned out, however, the Soviet censors felt these awe-inspiring scenes were aesthetically incongruous with state-approved socialist realism, and *Cosmic Voyage* was removed from circulation shortly after its release.

The 1930s also saw the emergence of one of Russian sci-fi's most important figures, Pavel Klushantsev, who in 1934 began a long career making space-themed science documentaries at Lenfilm Studios. His *Road to the Stars* (*Doroga k zvezdam*, 1957) is a spectacular and brave amalgam of factual science history and sci-fi prophecy, charting the history of Soviet space exploration from Konstantin Tsiolkovsky's earliest experiments with rockets through to the first Soviet space satellite – and then on into the future with the first moon landing, the construction of the first Soviet space station and a lunar base, and even a manned exploration of Mars.

Three years in the making, *Road to the Stars* is an ambitious and accomplished propaganda film with groundbreaking special effects and expertly crafted model work. One can't fail to notice a profound influence on Kubrick's much later *2001*:

A Space Odyssey (1968) in its realistic depictions of weightlessness, glowing planets and rotating model space stations. Klushantsev's film also captured the space-race zeitgeist; acting on instructions from film bureaucrats in Moscow, he added model footage depicting Sputnik 1, the Soviets' first Earth-orbiting satellite. As a result, the 50-minute film proved a hit with audiences in Soviet territories – and reportedly left viewers stunned when excerpts were screened by Walter Cronkite on prime-time American television.

All of which makes Klushantsev's subsequent film – his only full-length feature *Planet of Storms* (*Planeta Bura*, 1962) – something of a disappointment. One of the better-known Soviet sci-fi films of the era, it follows an expedition to Venus by a team of cosmonauts – four men, a girl and a bulky robot clearly modelled on Robby the Robot from MGM's *Forbidden Planet* (1956) – who are forced to descend to the planet's surface when their two spaceships are damaged by meteors. Once on land, they encounter malevolent lizard-men, predatory pterodactyls and man-eating plants, before finally escaping back to space.

Despite some enjoyably surreal moments, *Planet of Storms* comes across as a rather careless B movie, abandoning the visionary scope and craftsmanship of Klushantsev's previous films in favour of camp thrills involving unconvincing monsters (extras clothed in feeble rubber outfits) and rumbling model volcanoes. A far cry from the meticulously scientific, pseudo-documentary



Roger Corman acquired 'Planeta Bura' and re-edited it as 'Voyage to the Planet of Prehistoric Women'



STILLS, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (PHOTOPOST)

approach of *Road to the Stars*, *Planet of Storms* with its monsters and robots seems more influenced by American sci-fi schlock of the 1950s. No surprise, then, that Roger Corman acquired Klushantsev's film and distributed it theatrically across America in a re-edited, bowdlerised version with added footage, first as *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet* (1965) and then again as *Voyage to the Planet of Prehistoric Women* (1968), on which a young Peter Bogdanovich cut his directing teeth.

A similar fate would befall the two space-themed films made by Klushantsev's contemporary Mikhail Kariukov, in the process giving a career boost to another Corman protégé, Francis Ford Coppola. Produced by the smaller Dovzhenko Studio in Kiev – no doubt spurred on by Sputnik-era public interest in all things cosmic – Kariukov's 1960 debut *The Call of the Heavens* (*Nebo zovyet*, co-directed with Aleksandr Kozyr) is explicitly a story of the space race, with heroic Soviet cosmonauts rescuing stranded Americans who have become unstuck in their hasty attempts to beat the communists to Mars. Although unrelentingly dogmatic in its anti-American propaganda, Kariukov's film boasts impressive space sequences and vaguely expressionist art direction courtesy of Yuri Shvets (a veteran from *Cosmic Voyage*); in one sequence portraying the cosmonauts' emergency landing on a giant asteroid, Kariukov bathes his rocky scenery in the deep red glare of Mars. Also snapped up by Corman, *The Call of the Heavens* provided the young Coppola with an early break

when (working under a pseudonym) he was given the chance to shoot extra footage and remodel it as the (admittedly inferior) 1962 B picture *Battle Beyond the Sun*.

Kariukov's second sci-fi film, 1963's *Toward Meeting a Dream* (*Mechte navstrechu*, co-directed with Otar Koberidze) was a larger-budgeted production made by the Odessa film studio in the wake of Gagarin's triumphant first space flight. Just 66 minutes long, it follows another Mars rescue mission, this time of alien cosmonauts from the planet Centurian who are attempting a visit to Earth. With huge-scale futuristic panoramas created using matte effects, and fantastic alien worlds bathed in reds and greens, *Toward Meeting a Dream* boasts some of the best special effects and production design found in 1960s sci-fi. But for reasons that remain unclear, it would be his last film, and also the penultimate Russian sci-fi film of the 1960s. It was followed only by Yevgeni Sherstobitov's *The Andromeda Nebula* (*Tumannoct Andromedy*, 1968), the first instalment of an aborted series; poorly received on release, it remains difficult to track down.

In the meantime, however, there had also been sightings of sci-fi life in other Soviet bloc countries: the East German/Polish co-production *Silent Star* (aka *First Spaceship on Venus*/*Der schweigende Stern*, 1959), made at the legendary DEFA film studios, and Czechoslovakia's *Icarus XB-1* (1963) – both big-budget, utopian visions of international space exploration that criticise America via overt refer-

ence to the horrors of atomic war. Shot in black-and-white CinemaScope, *Icarus XB-1* follows a space journey to the planet Alpha Centauri in the year 2163. On the way, crew members are lost when a party boarding an Earth vessel (with English markings) from a decadent earlier century accidentally triggers a nuclear device; the crew is also temporarily struck by catalepsy caused by a mysterious radiation force that penetrates the ship. Despite its anti-American implications, *Icarus XB-1* was released in the US by Corman's American International Pictures as *Voyage to the End of the Universe* – albeit with a different ending that radically changed the film's meaning.

Based on a novel by Stanislaw Lem, Kurt Maetzig's *Silent Star* is about an expedition to Venus (reminiscent of Dali's surrealist dreamscapes with its misshapen formations, strange structures and bubbling slime), where the pan-ethnic cosmonauts encounter the remains of a civilisation ruined by avarice and warmongering. A glossy production filmed in gaudy Agfacolor and Total Vision, it's marked by unsubtle references to Hiroshima and the Western imperialist threat: in more than one instance, the sole American crew member (already severely chastised by his compatriots for joining a Soviet-led international mission) literally hangs his head in shame while a Japanese crew member recounts the horrors of the dropping of the atom bomb.

But *Silent Star* marked the high-water mark of DEFA's foray into sci-fi; its two further space-explo-

Soviet science fiction

ration films, *Eolomea* (1973) and *In the Dust of the Stars* (1977), were both comparatively low-key, forgettable productions that replicate the socialist utopian mores of *Silent Star* on a smaller scale, with garish 1970s space-age sets and fashions.

Inner space

In 1969 the Apollo moon-landing struck a devastating blow to the Soviet space programme, as a result of which the early 1970s saw Russian sci-fi turn to more thoughtful, highbrow concerns in films that even Roger Corman wouldn't have been able to re-edit into B pictures for the drive-in audience: Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) and *Stalker* (1979). Adapted from Stanislaw Lem's novel, *Solaris* concerns a scientist's assignment to a space station situated off a vast, sentient ocean-planet that somehow delves into the human unconscious, physically manifesting repressed desires and lost loves. Tarkovsky's grave inward journey is far from the previous decade's wide-eyed, patriotic tales of astral 'manifest destiny'; instead, it asks existential questions about the very idea of the (lost) space race, summed up when Dr Snaut says: "We don't want other worlds, we want mirrors."

Seven years later, Tarkovsky returned to sci-fi with *Stalker*, a loose adaptation of Boris and Arkady Strugatsky's novel *Roadside Picnic*. Set in and around an unnamed industrial city of the future, it follows an illegal guide (or stalker) as he leads a writer and a scientist through a perilous forbidden space known as "The Zone" to find "The Room" – a place where one's innermost desires are realised. Tarkovsky's dystopian future is created from the dilapidated chemical factories and power plants of the economically stagnant Brezhnev era. Seen today, the film's decaying industrial world, with its uninhabited "zone", seems horrifically prophetic of the 30-kilometre Nuclear Power Plant Exclusion

Zone or 'Zone of Alienation' created in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster that would befall the Ukrainian SSR only a few years later in 1986.

The precursor of several dystopian sci-fi allegories made in the deteriorating Soviet Union of the 1980s, *Stalker* was a key influence on the emerging director Konstantin Lopushansky, who worked on it as an assistant. Lopushansky's first feature *Letters from a Dead Man* (*Pisma myortvovo cheloveka*, 1986) is a nightmarish vision of human existence after a nuclear holocaust, depicting life among a community of fallout-ravaged survivors confined within an underground shelter. The protagonist, a guilt-ridden ex-scientist, maintains a dim faith – communicated through symbolic letters written to his dead son – that the human spirit will somehow endure. The film ends as, Moses-style, he leads a band of surviving children through the nuclear winter to an uncertain new life. Lopushansky's grainy sepia images of windswept chaos are unrelentingly grim, but the glimmer of hope he offers in the children's climatic exodus betrays a redemptive humanity that earned the film international critical acclaim.

Even more impressive, however, was his 1989 follow-up *Visitor to a Museum* (*Posetitel muzeya*), which won him a prize at the Moscow Film Festival. Set in a barren, polluted future where some of the population have become deformed mutants housed in wire-fenced reservations, it's a dystopian vision of Earth's annihilation. A solemn visitor becomes a Christ-like idol to these enslaved subhumans when he embarks on a pilgrimage to a ruined museum, which can only be reached during the annual low tide of its surrounding ocean. Made at a time when religion was suppressed by the Soviet state, *Visitor to a Museum* is an unabashed Christian allegory depicting a Chernobyl-inspired future hell created by man's

arrogant pursuit of science and industry. (Lopushansky later headed the St Petersburg Christian Film Association in the post-perestroika 1990s.) With its slow, long-take tracking shots, tinted images and brooding music, the film is noticeably indebted to Tarkovsky, both thematically and stylistically. As in *Stalker*, Lopushansky uses the real disused factories and industrial detritus of the ailing Soviet state to evoke his future world.

Other notable dystopias of the late Soviet era include Karen Shakhnazarov's surrealist critique of bureaucracy *Zero City* (*Gorod Zero*, 1989), about a Moscow engineer trapped in an irrational small town, and Georgi Daneliya's absurdist comedy *Kindza-Dza* (1986), which depicts the corrupt and unequal society of a faraway desert planet. But equally symbolic of Soviet decline were the few films made during the 1980s that continued the earlier narrative of earnest space exploration. While often strikingly odd and entertaining, latter-day Soviet pop-space films such as *To the Stars by Hard Ways* (*Cherez ternii k zvezdam*, 1981), *Orion's Loop* (*Petlya Oriona*, 1982) and *Moon Rainbow* (*Lunmaya raduga*, 1984) are characterised by primeval scripts and outmoded special effects.

Viewed alongside the dystopian pictures, these later space films tell a similar story of decline, signposting the road to perestroika and a new era of capitalist democracy. But now at least the excavated glories and oddities of earlier Russian sci-fi cinema can be savoured once again – a strange and oddly moving monument to the dreams of the Soviet era.

■ The season 'Kosmos: A Soviet Space Odyssey' runs throughout July and August at BFI Southbank, London. Mosfilm productions can be viewed online at www.cinema.mosfilm.ru



BIRTH OF A GENRE
The first Soviet science-fiction film, 'Aelita, Queen of Mars' (1924) influenced Fritz Lang with its constructivist designs

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Buried on its release in 1981, Ivan Passer's *'Cutter's Way'* now looks like the last blast of the American New Wave of the 70s. **Michael Atkinson** welcomes its rerelease

CLOSE TO THE BONE

The mysteries were always there. From the first trance gestures of the opening credits of Ivan Passer's *Cutter's Way* (1981), it was clear something special and hypnotic was happening: the slo-mo dance of the Fiesta Peque parade and its flower-festooned Las Senioritas coming directly at us in the hazy Santa Barbara sunshine, the monochromatic image slowly acquiring colour like a blush, the unforgettable Jack Nitzsche score – a ghostly serenade for bells, xylophone and handsaw – strumming up out of the aural ether with a tentativeness suggesting a sense of unease and loss that would not, in fact, relent in your mind even after the film was through.

Of course, this séance glow has become clear only in rich retrospect, because at first *Cutter's Way* was a film no one seemed to get. As with so many films *maudits*, the tribulations of its bad fortune and misrelease seem to reflect its own story arc, as if the movie itself had tried to deliver a secret truth and been suppressed. Enjoying a rerelease this month, alongside a BFI retrospective for its star Jeff Bridges, Passer's atmospheric daydream has a history of being continually rediscovered.

Cutter's Way is adapted from Newton Thornburg's 1976 novel *Cutter and Bone*, in which a man drunkenly witnesses a body being dumped, only to find his best friend – Vietnam veteran Cutter – dragging him into a desperate quest to expose the killer. Jockeyed around between studios and victimised by executive turnover – taken up and then dropped by Dustin Hoffman and director Robert Mulligan – the project was eventually shepherded to United Artists by nascent producer Paul R. Gurian, and entrusted to Ivan Passer, the émigré Czech director who had directed *Intimate Lighting* (1965) and written scripts for Milos Forman before leaving Prague for Hollywood in the wake of the 1968 Soviet invasion. The studio wanted Bridges as the womanising commitment-phobe Bone, Passer wanted John Heard as the one-eyed, one-legged alcoholic Cutter and Lisa Eichhorn as his soul-wasted wife Mo, and at some point fate smiled and UA suit David Field flipped the green light.

But this was 1980, and apparently no one told anyone involved that the 1970s had ended. With its laser focus on character, evocative capture of grungily specific Americana, implicit sense of class warfare, despairing post-'Nam context and fasci-

nating employment of narrative and visual ellipses, *Cutter and Bone* (as it was originally titled) was a 70s film from the ground up. Little did we know, one year into the Reagan administration, how endangered the sincere, thorny, sometimes haywire but most often scorchingly rigorous movies of the yet-to-be-recognised American New Wave were – or how thoroughly we would come to mourn their dirty cocktail of social protest, youth-culture empowerment, international cinephilia and prole restlessness.

The best of the films from that period still date less than most subsequent Oscar winners, and watching Passer's film – trailing innocently, almost idealistically, in the wake of the 'movement' – can today be akin to watching the great silents of the years 1927 to 1929, which attained transcendence even as talkies prepared to lay waste the medium's expressiveness. What fascinating, gritty, resonant, mysterious concoctions might we have seen in the 1980s, had Spielberg and Lucas not turned the newly matured Hollywood sensibility into an adolescent carnival ride?

Naturally, the ambivalence and grown-up tenor of *Cutter and Bone* baffled the UA bigwigs, who gave

it a modest US release in a few cities; the savaging it received from (among a few other near-sighted critics) *The New York Times's* shrugging dope Vincent Canby encouraged the studio to pull it after a single week. A week later, other critics delivered hosannas in the national weeklies, and with that encouragement the film was shuttled over to the company's 'arthouse' wing, United Artist Classics, for a second chance, receiving a title change and exposure in stateside festivals.

Critics can rescue films occasionally, just as they can condemn them to the abyss, and the unmarketable nature of *Cutter's Way* was as vulnerable as an orchid. Rereleased in the summer of 1981, in the lingering dog days of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Escape from New York* and *Arthur*, it vanished again, only to reappear like so many blockbuster-steam-rollered small films in the low-grade perpetuity of home video. Its reputation as a new American classic has been slowly escalating ever since.

The legacy of noir

The American New Wave connection is important, not merely because of the film's style and pedigree (Passer's 1971 junkie drama *Born to Win*, with a young Robert De Niro way down the cast list, was a minor but pivotal entry in the canon), but because the American 70s were as much about the legacy of *noir* as they were a gestalt of Euro New Wavism, Cassavetes realism, film-school freedom and Direct Cinema documentary. In the Nixon/Nam years, realism and salience translated roughly into a new look at *noir's* expressive capacity for individual doom, self-destruction and surrender to the road, all the chillier for usually being shot in convincing, unrelenting (if overcast) noonlight. *Cutter's Way* grabbed this notion by its threadbare lapels – it's nothing if not a pungent reinvention of *noir's* fatalism in the hothouse suburban fringes, dazed by the horrifying damage of a new and sickening war.

Poisoned by booze and Lost Generation self-indulgence, the film's characters are simultaneously iconic and squalidly real, forming a tense sexual triangle of self-destructing tragedy. Without needing to be told, we know these are the end times for this little corner of California. Heard's Cutter is the troublesome vertex, a raging, childish extrovert on a suicidal tear, almost Wildean in his ornate, allusion-packed speech, but decidedly anti-social – even criminal – in his self-definition. He is



LOST SOUL
In *'Cutter's Way'*, Vietnam vet Cutter (John Heard, above and right) drags his friend Bone (Jeff Bridges, far right) into a quixotic quest for justice



the film's emasculated war ghost, a self-dramatising pest unwanted and ricocheting around in the machinery of the New America like so many antiheroes from 70s films. It's part of the story's brilliance that he tries, rather pathetically, to fill the hole Vietnam has left in him – and in middle America – with an attempt to solve a murder mystery, and an absurd stab at unlikely justice.

After Bone spots a man dumping a girl's body in an alley trashcan, he and his friend Cutter set out to expose the culprit. But the film uses the convenience of the mystery narrative just as Cutter uses it as a redemptive obsession – as a way to structure and then kill time while we wait for *The Fall*. Passer deftly leaves out important details: we don't see the man who dumps the body in an alley trashcan any better than Bone did, and until the very last blackout, we have little or no solid data to go on. For Cutter, of course, the accretion of circumstantial evidence and the outraged sense of class injustice (his target is a painfully wealthy Santa Barbara magnate, played by Stephen Elliott) are enough to feed his embittered inner dragon, and we all get dragged along, hoping for salvation just as Cutter does, but knowing we may be just as wrong – and just as foolish.

Bone, meanwhile, is the America that skated over the thin ice of the war, clinging to the coat-tails of the moneyed class and getting by on his charm and cocksmanship, but terrified of commitment to anything: a relationship, a home, a career, a story, a cause. (Bridges's natural grace and sangfroid ignite a role that could have been dull – just watch him saunter through the ritzy hotel lobby, or wander through other people's rooms with his belt buckle hanging open.) Bone's bond with Cutter goes deep enough to be beyond question (we never discover how they met), but now – like

Cutter tries to fill the hole Vietnam left in him with an attempt to solve a murder mystery

the Santa Barbara suburbs we see, houses and cars and neighbourhoods all ageing out and going into disrepair – he faces obsolescence. And so, though he resists the obvious with every fibre of his being, Bone attaches himself to Cutter precisely because of his friend's reckless sense of all or nothing.

Indelible creation

It's easy to see how these men are emblematic of American moods and flaws – and it's no accident that they're both men. Cutter's wife Mo (Lisa Eichhorn) is a walking metaphor too – the woman waiting for the men in control of her life to grow up; but she is an indelible creation in her own right. Where did she come from, with her froggy voice, vodka-bloodshot eyes, sleepy-ruminative way of talking, her quiet but fearsome indignation? Like Cutter and Bone, dragging a squandered history towards an absent future, Mo is something of a myth in her own mind; the three of them talk about themselves as if they're in an obscure epic story they can't quite figure out. Mo is the savviest of the trio, but all three are far less brilliant than they think they are, particularly the often dumbstruck Bone.

Passer's film is always surprising – the scene in which Bone finally talks an exhausted Mo into bed is breathtaking in revealing extremes we didn't expect, as Mo openly sobs in misery, and Bone never disrupts his flow or gives up trying to engage

her. Her eventual fate is heartbreaking, nudged by Jeffrey Alan Fiskin's screenplay (not Thornburg's novel, which Fiskin described in a 1981 *Film Comment* article as an "instant replay of *Easy Rider*") into a horrifying martyrdom: a sacrifice in the name of resisting power, or her husband's delusional idealism, or Bone's everlasting boyhood, or all three – or some other blight lurking under the still waters of a society that has long since given up its principles.

Cutter's Way may be the best film made about the ripple effect of the Vietnam War on home-front doorsteps, and it achieves this largely by way of characters who don't represent 'us', but are fiercely and unquestionably themselves. They are a gift from Thornburg's book, but as much as Passer's movie feels novelistic in its weft of themes, it's also an achievement of textures. Thornburg's novel may have offered up some of this steak-thick dialogue, filthy with unspoken things and half-references, but it didn't have this light and shadow (cinematography by the redoubtable Jordan Cronenweth), this palpable aura of rueful helplessness – and it didn't have these people, who linger in four dimensions like neighbours we've had, with problems we couldn't help solve.

"You can assassinate movies as you can assassinate people. I think UA murdered the film," Passer told Richard T. Jameson in that same *Film Comment* piece. "Or at least they tried to murder it." Tried but failed: Cutter, Bone and Mo would not be forgotten, and *Cutter's Way* is still emerging as its decade's *The Sun Also Rises*, alive and lovely and sorrowful.

■ *'Cutter's Way'* is rereleased on 10 June, and has an extended run at BFI Southbank, London, from 24 June as part of the Jeff Bridges retrospective, which continues throughout June and July

network

THE ARTHUR HAYNES SHOW

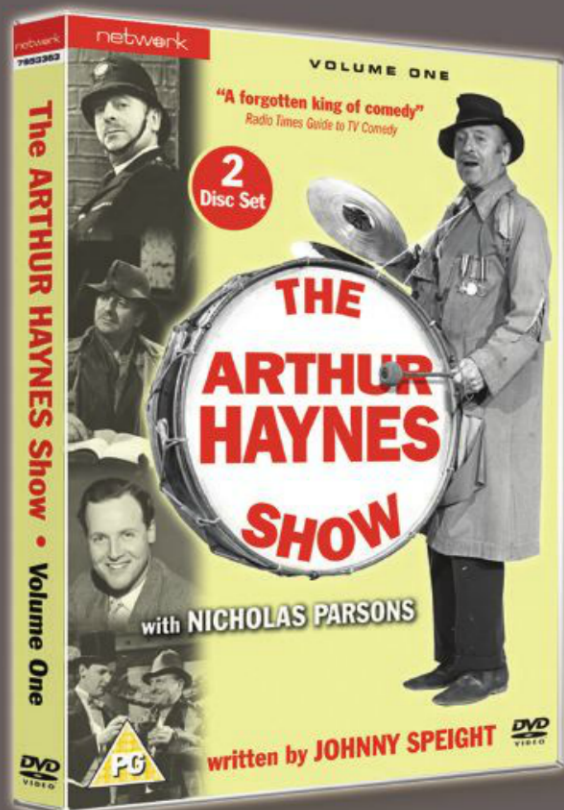
Volume One

"A forgotten king of British TV comedy"
Radio Times Guide to TV Comedy

Scripted by "Alf Garnett" creator Johnny Speight, with music and special guests and series co-star Nicholas Parsons, Arthur Haynes was in his time the most popular comedian in Britain. Haynes' exuberant performances won him the Variety Club ITV Personality award of 1961, as well as an appearance at that year's Royal Variety Performance.

Forty-five years after his untimely death, Arthur Haynes' long-overlooked contribution to British comedy is acknowledged with this DVD release, presenting thirteen restored episodes from the 1960 run of The Arthur Haynes Show - the earliest editions known to survive.

As seen on BBC4's *Me & Arthur Haynes* documentary featuring Nicholas Parsons & Paul Merton.

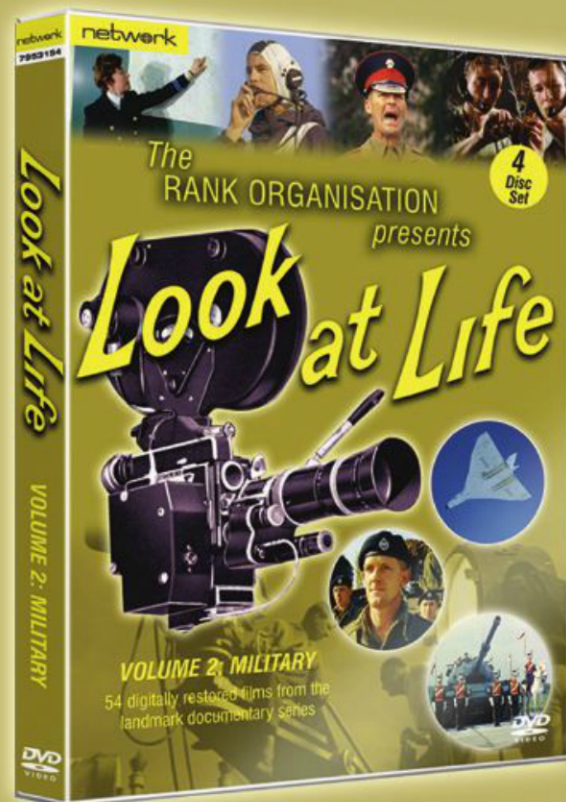


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Reviews

54 FILM OF THE MONTH

56 FILMS

84 DVDS

92 BOOKS



Reviews, synopses and credits for all the month's new films, plus the pick of the new books and DVDs

.....
Senna Asif Kapadia's documentary about the Formula 1 legend is closer to what you'd expect from a film about a doomed rock star or actor rather than a racing driver **p76**
.....

Children of war

With the Oscar-nominated *'Incendies'*, French-Canadian director Denis Villeneuve views the internecine conflicts of the Middle East through the prism of a family tragedy of Greek proportions. By **Roger Clarke**

Incendies

Denis Villeneuve, 2010

From the outset, *Incendies* is clearly not going to be your average tale of conflict in the Middle East. We open with a slow, dreamy pan accompanied by a Radiohead song, 'You and Whose Army?'. We look out of the window on to a scene of pastoral loveliness: palm trees swaying in a warm desert wind, an oasis alive with birdsong and cicadas (Jordan, as immaculately photographed by André Turpin). The camera pulls back as the music wafts, distantly at first – absurd, like a Noel Coward song played at the wrong speed on an old wind-up gramophone. "Come on, come on/ Holy Roman Empire/ Come on if you think/ Come on if you think/ You can take us all on," Thom Yorke croons in words you can hardly make out. A series of almost static framings follows; the children in the shot seem to have a sad, ethereal beauty. It's puzzling, even as it's affecting, and for a moment the film seems to teeter on the brink of disaster – it really does look like a plausible Radiohead video for the song being played.

Among the children is one angry boy with three dots on his ankle. The camera zooms in closer and ever closer to his eye, into the well of hatred and abuse that will propel the whole movie. The music continues as we glide forward to a different time frame – contemporary Canada – and alight on a room in a lawyer's office, impacted with paper files. We move in close on a file marked "Nawal Marwan". The colour palette changes slightly to a drab, maple beige. It's as if the director, having delivered a quite shamelessly manipulative emotional punch, suddenly takes everything off the stove and stops cooking.

We now find ourselves in the lives of a brother, Simon (Maxim Gaudette), and sister, Jeanne (Méïssa Désormeaux-Poulin), attending the reading of the will left by their mother, Nawal Marwan, with whom they had a difficult relationship. The will requires them to travel to her



Unfolding in the quiet of offices and homes where relationships break down, it could be seen as an old-fashioned familial mystery story

(unspecified) country of origin in the Middle East and hand sealed letters to a half-brother they never knew they had and the father they thought was dead.

French-Canadian director Denis Villeneuve – here adapting (and slimming down considerably) an award-winning three-and-a-half-hour play by Wajdi Mouawad – is a director who knows how to deal with complex issues sensitively. His dramatisation of the 1989 Montreal Massacre – Canada's Columbine, when 14 female students were singled out for killing by a gunman – *Polytechnique* (2009) was shot in black and white to minimise its more incandescence and sensational aspects (the opposite to his thinking in *Incendies*, with its colour-saturated vision of a bus set on fire after all those inside have been shot). *Polytechnique* proved Villeneuve had a steady hand when it came to national trauma; he consulted those bereaved by the massacre and specifically excluded the mention of the gunman's name. This sensitivity is probably the reason why he's so well regarded in Francophone countries, and why he was seen as the right man for the job by playwright Wajdi Mouawad, who told him to do

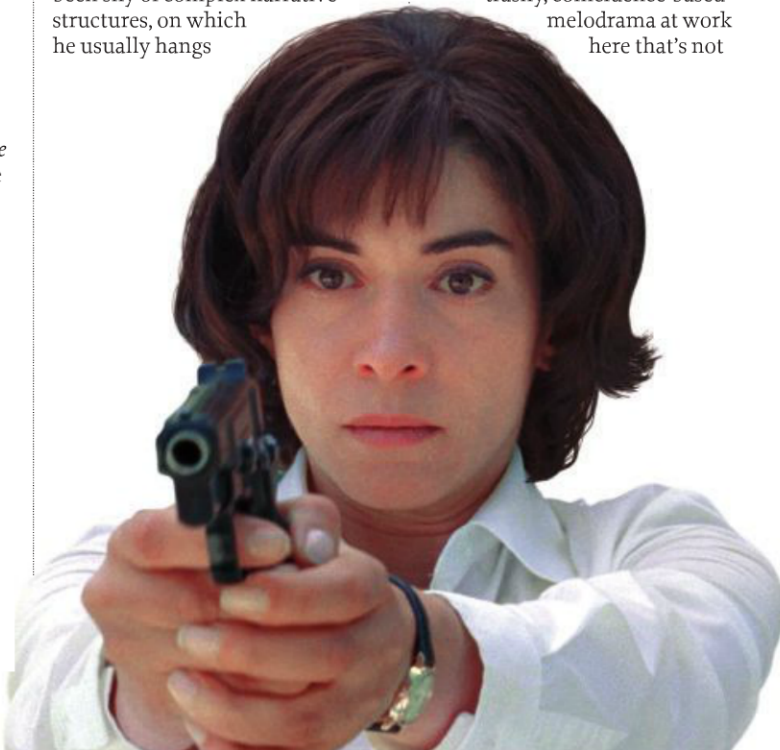
whatever he wanted with his play – which is just what Villeneuve did.

Just as Villeneuve leaves out the name of the killer in *Polytechnique*, so in *Incendies* he leaves out the name of the country. We all know it's Lebanon, but the liberating aspect of the omission is that it frees him from any need to be literal. As a director he's never been shy of complex narrative structures, on which he usually hangs

the consequences of violence – and especially violence against women. *Maelström* (2000) was a black comedy narrated by a fish, involving a woman coming to terms with an abortion and the accidental killing of a man. Such complexity requires precise editing, and Villeneuve is well served on *Incendies* by Monique Dartonne, best known for her work with director Tony Gatlif on *Gadjo Dilo* (1997) and *Exiles* (2004).

In fact Villeneuve must really have liked *Exiles*, since he also cast its lead actress in the central role of Nawal: Lubna Azabal, also familiar to Western audiences on the strength of her performance in the Palestinian film *Paradise Now* (2005), which shares with *Incendies* a dislike of didactic and ideological positioning. She lends a solemn and shell-shocked intensity to her role as Nawal, whom we see mostly in flashback – first as a rustic in love, until her boyfriend is murdered by her family and her baby taken away to become a boy soldier; then as a middle-class professional turned Baader-Meinhof style assassin; then finally as a prisoner who endures rape as a weapon of war.

Incendies may cover similar literal territory to Samuel Maoz's 2009 Golden Lion-winner *Lebanon*, but there's also a sense of almost trashy, coincidence-based melodrama at work here that's not





SINS OF THE MOTHER
After reading her will, two siblings (Méïssa Desormeaux-Poulin and Maxim Gaudette, left) travel to the Middle East to uncover the past of their mother Nawal (Lubna Azabal, above and below)

usually seen in sombre, sectarian-issue dramas of this kind. The extraordinary thing is that it works. Like *Lebanon*, it has its roots in that country's 1980s conflict between Christian and Muslim militias, but where *Lebanon* toils in the noise and darkness of a tank in battle, *Incendies* unfolds mainly in the quiet of offices and homes where family relationships break down under intolerable strain.

In some respects, it could be seen as an old-fashioned familial mystery story couched as a war film – for there is war in this film, unfair, stupid and reckless, with whole busloads of people massacred and little children shot down like dogs in ruined streets by stone-cold snipers. This is not war about identity, ideology and explosions; this is war as rape and incest – and parents eating their children, like Saturn in Goya's famous painting.

Canada's submission for this year's Best Foreign Language Film Oscar (it lost out to Denmark's *In a Better World*), *Incendies* is what's known in Hollywood parlance as a

breakout film, with which a director lauded on home territory suddenly becomes known to a far wider international audience. Aside from *Lebanon*, one comparison would be with Villeneuve's Canadian compatriot Atom Egoyan. In another universe Egoyan might have pulled off something similar with *Ararat*, his anguished 2002 misfire about the legacy of the Armenian Massacres. *Incendies* acquires its heft from some very deep places – Greek tragedy rather than newflashes. With its shattering encounters between sons and their long-lost parents, it's almost an anti-*Oedipus*. (This intertwining of the archaic and the new was something Pasolini understood very well.)

In the end, though, we find ourselves not on the battlefields of Lebanon but on the grey streets of Canada, where the climax comes with the brother and sister's final delivery of the sealed letters their mother left them, which turn out to go to the same man – a man with a trinity of dots on his ankle. As a moment of revealed horror it is as startling and bare as any in cinema; the summation of all those years of pain and killing is quiet, disgusting – and true.

For credits and synopsis, see page 67

A punch in the jaw

Denis Villeneuve on negotiating the politics of *'Incendies'*

When I saw Wajdi Mouawad's play *'Incendies'* it was like a punch in the jaw. I emerged from the theatre on shaky knees. Right away I knew I was going to make it into a movie. I decided to follow the play's lead and set my film in an imaginary space like Costa-Gavras's *'Z'* [1969], so as to free it from any political bias. The film is about politics, but is also apolitical. The play's purpose was to delve into the subject of anger – not to fuel such anger – and the setting of *'Incendies'* [the Lebanon] is a historical minefield.

The wars that have wracked this region sometimes involved as many as 17 different factions, with alliances and betrayals of baffling complexity for neophytes. To remain faithful to this reality, the political situation had to remain complex without undermining the storyline. Viewers of the film need to understand the gist of what can be understood, while accepting that the situation has become too complex to be boiled down to black and white.

Wajdi's staging is riddled with very powerful theatrical images, of a rare beauty. I couldn't use them because they belonged to the theatrical alphabet, but I was able to go back to their source and translate them



DENIS VILLENEUVE

into film language. Wajdi provided me some helpful keys.

To transpose such a dramatic text to the screen while avoiding melodrama, I opted for the sobriety of raw realism, retaining the mythological factor in the play via natural light and shadows. Emotion had to avoid being an end in itself, but instead a means of achieving catharsis. *'Incendies'* is also Jeanne and Simon's journey towards the source of their mother Nawal's hatred. This is a very universal quest and it touches me deeply. But I admit that it took a long time to achieve the film's dramatic balance in the screenplay. Each sequence could have inspired a feature film!



Nuclear fallout: Biken

After the Apocalypse

United Kingdom 2010
Director: Antony Butts
Certificate 12A 64m 6s

Citing such dystopian visions as *Gattaca* (1997), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1990), *Stalker* (1979) and *Threads* (1984) in the context of Antony Butts's feature debut is as much a defence mechanism as a list of films exploring similar territory, since the others have the escape route of being fictional. *After the Apocalypse*, however, is a soberingly pessimistic documentary about the consequences of decades of nuclear testing in a remote region of Kazakhstan known as the Polygon, where 456 bombs were exploded between 1949 and 1991.

One of the most disturbing details in a film hardly bereft of them is the revelation by Dr Boris Gusev of the Semipalatinsk Institute of Radiation Medicine that the Soviet authorities deliberately let people continue to live in the Polygon region in order to observe the effects of radiation. This helped devise viable plans for population survival in the event of nuclear war, but has potentially (the film stresses that the evidence is more statistical than medically conclusive) led to a quarter of a million people bearing genetic after-effects, either through living through the tests or being descended from those who did.

The solution, according to local maternity services head Dr Toleukhan Nurmagambetov, couldn't be simpler: issue everyone with a 'genetic passport' and ban those considered 'defective'

from reproducing. Aware that this is a controversial proposal (to put it mildly), he brings up Nazi eugenics himself – but insists that his ideas are different, disingenuously stating that, "When they are applied to ethnicities, it is genocide, but when applied to diseases, it is medicine," and repeatedly emphasising that his primary motive is the children's welfare. He backs this up with a trip to a care home for severely disabled infants (some of them missing limbs) whose parents clearly couldn't cope with them.

The film's second half sees the political and the personal collide in the form of pregnant shepherd Bibigul. In brutally blunt consultations that will have British viewers recalling even their worst NHS experiences with warm nostalgia, she is repeatedly advised to have an abortion on the grounds that her "frightful face" indicates that she was genetically affected by Polygon tests and is therefore twice as likely to bear a disabled child. Bibigul, as stubborn as her sheep and driven by maternal urges far stronger than Dr Nurmagambetov's attempts to get her to look at the wider picture, goes ahead anyway – a cheerily human reaction in a film that otherwise makes one despair at what the species is capable of.

Butts intercuts this with shots of the Kazakh Steppe, some of whose eerily beautiful features, such as a frozen lake, were by-products of the nuclear tests. The grizzled farmer Serik, 45 going on 80, obsessively takes Geiger readings between swigs of vodka, which he claims will reinforce his stomach against radiation. Bibigul's mother Biken recalls watching the explosions from under thick felt cloth, her half-blind face a permanently gnarled reminder. The phrase 'the Cold War' is never uttered, and no wonder: for the Polygon inhabitants, the anti-American sabre-rattling could hardly have got any hotter. **Michael Brooke**

CREDITS

Produced by
Antony Butts
Producers
Natasha Dack
Sarah Tierney
Filmed by
Antony Butts
Film Editor
Hugh Williams
Composer
Tom Player
Dubbing Mixer
Pip Norton

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Tigerlily
for More4
With the support of
WorldView Broadcast

Media Scheme
Developed in the
framework of the
EURODOC programme
Executive Producers
Christopher Hird
George Carey

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Dartmouth Films

5,769 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Kazakhstan, the present. Between 1949 and 1991 the Soviet Union tested its nuclear weapons in a region known as the Polygon, and let people continue living there in order to monitor the long-term effects of radiation in the event of a nuclear war. At the Semipalatinsk maternity clinic, Dr Toleukhan Nurmagambetov calls for a 'genetic passport' that will prevent radiation-damaged people from reproducing, citing statistical evidence and examples of birth anomalies. He repeatedly advises the pregnant Bibigul, a shepherd from heavily irradiated Sarzhal, to undergo genetic tests or have an abortion. She refuses, and gives birth to a healthy child.

The Beaver

USA/United Arab Emirates 2011
Director: Jodie Foster
Certificate 12A 90m 52s

To the gallery of fake noses, fat-suits, age makeup and other outlandish actorly handicaps, add perhaps the oddest one of all: a natty, ratty beaver glove-puppet, permanently affixed to the hand of famously unfiltered fallen star Mel Gibson. It is one of the more unusual 'committed', ridiculous performances and, in its by-the-numbers story of marital and teenage dysfunction, like a deadpan parody.

Gibson stars, looking suitably haggard but no less energetic, as Walter Black, a shattered family man and CEO of a toy company (named, in an odd biblical echo, JerryCo) who uses a glove-puppet to engage with the world. In an introduction that could be goofily scored to a lugubrious one-man band, the despair of Walter's motel-room exile from the family home is established and, just as quickly, dispelled through the serendipity of a dumpster discovery: 'the Beaver' becomes Walter's entire public personality; at home and work, he hands out cards that announce it as his new prescription therapy.

Doomed redemption follows, resembling a comedy less in its sense of humour than in its arbitrary on-message rise-and-falls and Mad Libs character traits (in Kyle Killen's debut screenplay). Walter's wife and rollercoaster designer Meredith (Jodie Foster, who also directs) warily accepts, then embraces Walter's return, until suddenly the prospect of an anniversary dinner with the Beaver in attendance pushes her over the edge. Likewise, Walter's son Porter (sharp Anton Yelchin), a term-paper ghost writer, wins, loses and wins again the fancies of his stiff, plain client Norah (Jennifer Lawrence), a valedictorian who can't write, was busted for graffiti-tagging and mourns her dead brother. Somewhere along the way Walter also invents a woodworking set that's a bestseller until the craze conveniently evaporates.

Gibson and Foster treat the story and its device – the Beaver tosses out seemingly improvised language (postcoitally: "Rest up, you delicious little tart. There's more where that came from") – with a straight face, though Meredith is allowed to proclaim that it's "insane". And perhaps Gibson is one of the few actors who could dive into such material without floundering on screen. A dedicated entertainer (watch him throw himself into dreck like *What Women Want* as if he's Gene Kelly), he's not about to treat a movie-length therapy exercise as a throwaway. His puppetry is so detailed that the Beaver always reacts even when they are out of focus in the background, to the point of panting after the couple's marathon sexual reunion.

Walter's depression is so deep that the kernel of a serious movie does lie within *The Beaver*: there's something



Mr Strangelove: Riley Thomas Stewart, Mel Gibson

genuinely uncomfortable about Walter's total projection of personality, implying an utterly hollowed sense of self. You do indeed find your eye split between puppet and Walter, who has the worn-out leftovers of the panic and nerviness that served Gibson well in better days. It echoes the split between Foster's respectful direction and the unorthodox material, which briefly becomes a bewildering dissonance when Walter finally reaches bloody rock bottom.

In that sense, Foster's curious movie

is at once a realisation of the kind of 'risky' script that never gets made and an unwitting signifier of typical Hollywood contrivance. Mel Gibson and his hand-puppet, going through the motions, become a physical embodiment of any given award-courting, jaw-dropping creative choice that you're expected to accept and embrace, even as *The Beaver* preserves some smidgen of distinction through the mindboggling politeness with which Foster presents its weirdness.

➡ **Nicolas Rapold**

CREDITS

Produced by
Steve Golin
Keith Redmon
Ann Ruark
Written by
Kyle Killen
Director of Photography
Hagen Bogdanski
Editor
Lynzee Klingman
Production Designer
Mark Friedberg
Music by/Score
Produced by/Piano Solos
Marcelo Zarvos
Sound Mixer

Jimmy Sabat
Costume Designer
Susan Lyall

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Summit Entertainment
and Participant Media
present in association
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Dhabi an Anonymous
Content production
Executive Producers
Jeff Skoll
Mohammed Mubarak
Al Mazrouei
Paul Green
Jonathan King

CAST

Mel Gibson
Walter Black
Jodie Foster
Meredith Black
Anton Yelchin
Porter Black
Jennifer Lawrence
Norah
Cherry Jones
vice president
Riley Thomas Stewart
Henry Black
Zachary Booth
Jared
Michael Rivera
Hector
Matt Laurer
Jon Stewart

Terry Gross
themselves

Dolby Digital/DS
Colour by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Icon Film Distribution

8,178 ft +0 frames

The Big Picture

France 2010

Director: Eric Lartigau

There's no avoiding the challenge that labour-saving technologies pose for standard literary and cinematic plot tropes. Hard, in an age of smartphones and GPS, to abandon vulnerable teens to the mercy of redneck freaks. No need for our heroine to pore over microfiche pages in an evocatively dim library when she can do her research on Google. And how to filch another person's identity when a quick image search will blow the whole scheme sky-high? Any present-day Meredith Logue would engage in a little online research on her crush Dickie Greenleaf, whereupon she'd swiftly gather that Tom Ripley was not he...

A distinctly Ripley-esque saga, *The Big Picture* hasn't entirely dealt with the differences between identity in 1997, when the source novel was published, and identity in the present day, when the film is set. Would any runaway criminal seriously suppose that assuming the identity and career of a noted photographer was either a good idea or a sustainable plan? Considerable suspension of disbelief is required just to get past the premise. This isn't an impossible ask – most thrillers require some disregard for logic – but it is distracting, especially when setting the film a little way into the past would have provided a simple solution to the problem.

Fortunately, Romain Duris's performance as protagonist Paul is good enough to override the porous plotting. Rather than play Paul as a stock amoral antihero, Duris makes the character frail, edgy and impulsive enough to seem capable of self-sabotage via an impossibly flimsy plan to escape his unhappy Paris existence. Glossily packaged and dramatically scored though it is, *The Big Picture* is most effective if viewed not as the watertight, psychologically realistic genre thriller it seeks to be, but as a playfully dark exploration of the logical conclusions of certain fantasies with which we taunt and tempt ourselves. Though the film carefully distinguishes between 'reality' and 'imagination' – a sequence in which Paul pictures being arrested is rendered in stylised, dreamlike images – Paul's 'real' escapades are themselves the stuff of midlife daydreams: violent revenge on a sexual rival, abandonment of family responsibilities, sudden artistic acclaim, baggage-free romance with a giving, forgiving new partner. He may not be macho man but his adventures do suggest the male id let loose. However, like Ripley – or the protagonist of David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1996), who literally becomes a different person in order to blot out his old life – Paul can't escape simply by escaping. Even while his disguise holds, he's pursued by the knowledge of what he's done: by shame, dread of discovery and fear of himself. A quasi-redemptive ending doesn't quite make sense of what's gone before; but the sense of capricious fate scuppering best-laid plans offers a certain ironic satisfaction. ➡ **Hannah McGill**



Escape artist: Romain Duris, Marina Fois

SYNOPSIS Suburban America, the present. Walter Black, head of a toy company, is in a deep depression that leads to his moving out of the family home. After a drunken attempt at suicide, he finds a beaver hand-puppet, which allows him to function – he communicates through the puppet, in a Cockney accent. He returns home and is welcomed by his wife Meredith and younger son Henry, but not by sarcastic teenage son Porter. Porter, who ghost writes term papers for money, agrees to write a graduation speech for valedictorian Norah, an association that turns into dating. Walter returns to work, accompanied by the puppet at all times, and launches a beaver-themed woodworking set which becomes a bestseller. Porter and Norah go on a date that goes well until he takes her graffiti-tagging (an old pastime of hers) and brings up the subject of her dead brother. Meredith balks at Walter's bringing his puppet to their anniversary dinner, which ends with his freaking out and storming off. She then has to pick up Porter from jail after the police interrupt his graffiti-tag date with Norah. Learning that Walter's puppet wasn't prescribed by a doctor as he claimed, Meredith moves out, taking Henry and Porter with her. Walter has a violent altercation with his puppet. Sales of his woodworking toy decline after his erratic public appearances. Walter saws off his hand, with the puppet; during rehabilitation he is reunited with his family. Reconciled with Porter, Norah delivers his pessimistic speech. Walter and his family are together, and happy.

CREDITS

Produced by
Pierre-Ange Le Pogam
Screenplay,
Adaptation and
Dialogue
Eric Lartigau
Laurent de Bartillat
In collaboration with
Emmanuelle Bercot
Bernard Jeanjean
Based on the novel by
Douglas Kennedy
Director of
Photography
Laurent Dailland
Editor
Juliette Welfling
Art Direction
Olivier Radot
Original Music
Evgeni Galperine
Sacha Galperine
Sound
Pierre Excoffier
Gwenole LeBorgne
Dominique Gaboneau
Damien Lazzarini
Costume Designer
Anne Schlotte

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Production
Companies
EuropaCorp presents a
EuropaCorp, TF1 Films
Production, CiBy 2000
co-production with the
participation of Canal+,
CinéCinéma
In association with
Cofinova 6

CAST

Romain Duris
Paul
Marina Fois
Sarah
Niels Arestrup
Bartholomé
Branka Katic
Ivana
Eric Ruf
Grégoire
Catherine Deneuve
Anne
Enzo Caçote
Hugo
Luka Antic
Baptiste
Rachel Berger
Fiona
Esteban Carvajal
Alegria
Valéry
Florence Muller
Clarisse
Jean-Paul Bathary
Jean-Claude

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film
Company

French theatrical title
*L'Homme qui voulait
vivre sa vie*

Bridesmaids

USA/Japan 2011

Director: Paul Feig

Certificate 15 124m 58s

From *Bride Wars* to *27 Dresses*, the dramas of impending nuptials have been the focus of many recent romantic comedies. But they weren't produced by *Superbad*'s Judd Apatow, directed by *The Office*'s Paul Feig and starring *Saturday Night Live*'s Kristen Wiig. With its irreverent humour and comical cast, this female ensemble movie has more in common with Apatow's unisex *Knocked Up* (2007) than your average girlie wedding comedy.

Something of an American Bridget Jones, Annie (Wiig) is a hapless single woman pretending she's happy being a 'fuck buddy' to Ted (*Mad Men*'s Jon Hamm). When friend Lillian (Maya Rudolph) becomes engaged, Annie is desperate to prove her worth at a bridal party full of glamorous married women; she hopes to be the perfect maid of honour, but each plan inevitably ends in chaos.

In creating her exaggerated but relatable tragicomic heroine, co-writer Wiig holds a magnifying glass to the flaws and fears of thirtysomething single women. The rivalry that develops between kooky Annie and composed Helen (Rose Byrne), wife of Lillian's fiancé's boss, works on both a comic and a dramatic level, thanks to nuanced, semi-improvised performances and consistent characterisation. It also leads to some terrific set pieces: a scene in which the bridal party board a plane bound for a bachelorette party in Las Vegas starts with small character-based laughs and builds into brazen farce without losing fast-paced observational one-liners.

Like *The Hangover* (2009), *Bridesmaids* finds the opposite sex largely irrelevant. Husbands and fiancés are barely visible, so that Annie's romance with policeman Rhodes (the perplexingly Irish Chris O'Dowd) feels like a pleasant but unnecessary departure, contributing to an over-long running time that might have been better filled with comic interludes. It also smacks of hypocrisy: the script slams those who assume single life to be a fate worse than death and then sends a knight in a cop car to save Annie.

The friendship between Annie and Lillian has a stronger arc, ending with one of the film's most charming moments: at Lillian's wedding the two women sing and dance along to a Wilson Phillips song they adored as children. Heavy on improv and chemistry, it's a million miles from the carefully choreographed karaoke scenes of last year's *Sex and the City 2*. And, of course, any mention of *SATC2* puts this film into flattering perspective – whatever its flaws, *Bridesmaids* can be considered a step forward for mainstream female-focused comedies.

♥ Anna Smith



Wedding smasher: Kristen Wiig, Rose Byrne

CREDITS

Produced by
Judd Apatow
Clayton Townsend
Barry Mendel
Written by
Annie Mumolo
Kristen Wiig
Edited by
William Kerr
Mike Sale
Production Designer
Jefferson Sage
Music
Michael Andrews
Sound Mixer
Kenneth McLaughlin
Costume Designers
Leesa Evans
Christine Wada

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Companies
Universal Pictures
presents in association
with Relativity Media an
Apatow production
In association with
Dentsu Inc.
Executive Producer
Paul Feig

CAST

Kristen Wiig
Annie
Maya Rudolph
Lillian
Rose Byrne
Helen

Wendi McLendon-Covey
Rita
Ellie Kemper
Becca
Melissa McCarthy
Megan
Chris O'Dowd
Officer Rhodes
Matt Lucas
Gil
Rebel Wilson
Brynn
Michael Hitchcock
Don Cholodecki
Kali Hawk
Kahlua
Tim Heidecker
Doug
Terry Crews
boot camp instructor

Jill Clayburgh
Judy, Annie's mom

[uncredited]
Jon Hamm
Ted

Dolby Digital/DTS/
SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

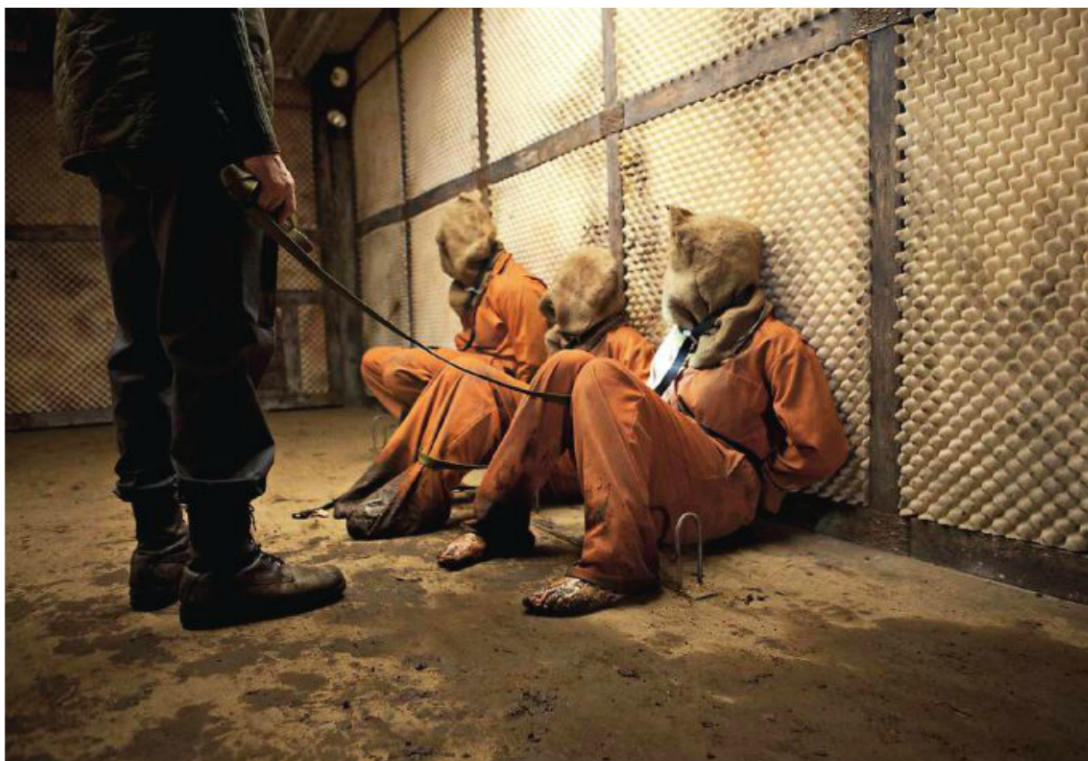
Distributor
Universal Pictures
International UK & Eire
11,247 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Los Angeles, the present. Single Annie has been working at a jewellery store since her bakery business failed. She is sleeping with the uncommitted Ted. When her friend Lillian becomes engaged, Annie is asked to be maid of honour. At the engagement party, Annie forms an immediate rivalry with Helen, wife of Lillian's fiancé's boss. Driving home, Annie is stopped by Officer Rhodes, who tells her to get her taillight fixed. Annie arranges a lunch for the bridal party, which leaves everyone except Helen suffering from food poisoning during a dress fitting.

Boarding a plane to Las Vegas for the bachelorette party, Helen gives nervous flyer Annie a pill; Annie's subsequent disruptive behaviour causes the flight to be grounded. Annie is demoted – Helen is asked to organise the bridal shower and the wedding instead.

Annie loses her job. She goes for a drink with Officer Rhodes and sleeps with him, but rejects him when he is kind to her. When Helen throws an elaborate bridal shower, Annie causes a scene and angers Lillian, who wants nothing more to do with her. Annie crashes her car, and Rhodes helps out; Ted comes to collect Annie but she gets out of his car when he demands oral sex.

On the wedding day, Helen asks Annie to find the missing Lillian; a reluctant Rhodes assists. Annie talks Lillian through her nerves and the two reconcile. The wedding is a success, and Rhodes is waiting for Annie afterwards.



Enter the void: 'Checkpoint'

Checkpoint

France/Canada 2010

Director: Olivier Abbou

Olivier Abbou's debut feature is essentially yet another variant on the backwoods-ordeal horror, as a group of upright yuppies become easy prey for nefarious rural folk. But next to rednecks or cannibals, *Checkpoint*'s bogeymen are intensely contemporary – a pair of deeply disturbed Gulf War veterans, one of whom served at that most corpulent of elephants in the room, Guantanamo Bay. For its first 20 minutes, *Checkpoint* appears to sit comfortably within the gruelling new wave of French horror (its original title, *Territoires*, recalls the earlier *Frontières*, whose antagonists were homicidal neo-Nazis) but thereafter the film lurches off in some very peculiar directions, becoming a painfully disjointed and exasperating affair.

Abbou does fairly well with a prolonged opening in which five young

Canadians driving home from the US are stopped by two men posing as customs officials. A disquieting meeting queasily escalates into a nightmarish situation; a passenger of Arabic descent is labelled a jihadist; impromptu cavity searches are performed; a resistant member of the group is shot. The survivors are whisked off to remote woodland where the men, Walt and Jesse, have fashioned a miniature Camp X-Ray – and where they are branded, clad in orange boiler suits and locked in cages. Rote sequences of psychological torture follow.

It soon becomes apparent that the film has nowhere to go with this provocative if dreadfully literal-minded premise. Momentum sputters when the focus switches for some time to Sam and Walter, without revealing any plausible motivation (besides being miffed at the state of the nation). But the film derails completely upon the abrupt introduction of a grizzled, heroin-addicted private eye, hired to find the detainees. It's a bold ploy to banish the prisoners off screen – a case could be made for it reflecting the fate

of the disappeared – but the result is like a rogue reel's incursion from another film, as this dishevelled mystic spouts philosophy to waitresses and experiences motel-room visions. Indeed, the climactic mood is quasi-Lynchian, accentuated by Clément Téry's discordant score. The desolate conclusion is self-consciously nihilistic but, like much of *Checkpoint*, more apt to elicit shrugs than to disturb.

➡ **Matthew Taylor**

CREDITS

Produced by

Raphaël Rocher
Jérôme Vidal
Sylvain Proulx
Richard Goudreau

Screenplay

Olivier Abbou
Thibault Lang Willar
Based on an original
idea by Thibault Lang
Willar

Director of

Photography
Karim Hussain

Editor

Douglas Buck

Production Designer

Jean A. Carrière

Original Music

Clément Téry

Sound Designer

Jean-François B. Sauvé

Costume Designer

Annie Dufort

© Capture (The Flag)

Films, Noodles

Production, Les Films

du Territoire (SP),

Meleny Productions,

SND

Production

Companies

Capture (The Flag)

Films, Noodles

Production, Les Films

du Territoire (SP),

Meleny Productions,

SND presents with the

participation of Téléfilm

Canada, Canal+,

CinéCinéma

Executive Producer

Jonathan Vanger

CAST

Cristina Rosato

Michelle

Michael Mando

Jalil

Roc LaFortune

Sam Torrence

Sean Devine

Walter Sotos

Nicole Leroux

Leslie

Alexandre Weiner

Andrew

Tim Rozon

Gabriel Delgado

Vlasta Vrana

sheriff

Caroline Redekopp

Doris

Stephen Shellen

Rick Brautigan

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Arrow Film Distributors

Ltd

French/Canadian

theatrical title

Territoires

The Conspirator

USA 2011

Director: Robert Redford

Certificate 12A 123m 1s

The cinema – and in fact the full blooming stardom – of Robert Redford seems little more by now than a withering ordeal by piety. Sanctimonious blue-eyed movie-stars-turned-Oscared-auteurs have become common, but Redford cut the mould, and his starchy, preaching sensibility emanates like spotlights from his films, just as it does from his past three decades of performances. (Consider, for instance, your irritation if anyone in real life high-handed you as Redford's Finch Hatton does everybody in *Out of Africa*.) Certainly, the labours of his ambivalent and adventurous contemporaries Paul Newman and Warren Beatty age far more complexly. Redford hasn't pleased anyone much since 1998's *The Horse Whisperer* (and then it pleased only a certain swath of indiscriminating romance-swoony moviegoers), but he has persisted and persists still, this time with a tepid historical saga executive produced by billionaire Joe Ricketts, whose new production company aims to make films that are "true to history". It sounds like a prescription in which Redford could happily locate some measure of righteousness, but such claims should be made carefully: in laying out the story of Mary Surratt, a boarding-house owner and John Wilkes Booth acquaintance who was tried for conspiracy in Lincoln's assassination and hanged, Redford and his screenwriters elide characters and combine others, and in general convert this unsavoury hunk of American injustice into a familiar three-act exercise more closely resembling old-school television drama than history.

Tired structural formula is de rigueur, but must the cinematography, over-fogged and lens-misty to a distracting degree, look like the 1980s too? Robin Wright is Surratt, and the match-up between Redford's pervasive air of stern sermonising and her iron-chinned tendency towards angry defensiveness is exasperating. (She has Redford's haughty, told-you-so squint.) The plot moves forward after the shooting and the arrests via the simple tension that post-war politics put on the selection of the defence attorney for the military tribunal – no one wanted the job for fear of being accused of treason. The fraught climate that electrified society after Lincoln's death is a fascinating subject rarely if ever explored on film, but it's a job for Wajda or Tavernier (or Rivette!); Redford positions each character, from Kevin Kline's neocon war secretary to the young social circle around James McAvoy's wary but idealistic lawyer, as black-and-white chessboard figures, voicing stock opinions in either pragmatic, humanistic or reactionary modes. This is no better or worse than scraps of other leaden Hollywood big-issue



The importance of being earnest: James McAvoy

films over the past three decades, in which purposeful scenes and declarative statements feel like bricks being laid into a wall.

Wright, for her part, merely sits and exudes bitter nobility, and the motley assemblage of craggy character actors bluster about with some delicacy in their sideburns and tunics, but earnestness does not buy the movie conviction. Dogged and fiery, McAvoy's Frederick Aiken shoulders the movie's dramatic undulations, as he fact-finds and tries to negotiate with the commission and his client, sacrificing, of course, his reputation and pretty fiancée in the process. Aiken's every manoeuvre is squelched by the commission's preordained judgement, which frustrates both the character and the film's attempt at legal-drama progression.

But amid the actory fuming and the beats borrowed wholesale from *Breaker Morant* (1979) and even *Paths of Glory* (1957), it becomes clear that the self-regarding importance of *The Conspirator* hinges on its evocation of present-day Guantanamo Bay, with its tribunals, hawkish administrators, general disregard for judicial rights and gangs of guilty-by-vaporous-association prisoners. Which is a sound thing, it seems, since the dire tale of Surratt's trial and execution – America's first woman – is less than fascinating in its legal particulars. Still, the analogy is loose, to say the least, and anyway, if Surratt, who was sacrificed in an attempt to calm the agitated public,

is a martyr to something, what is that exactly? "Witness History" is Ricketts's company tagline, right there in the credits, but the film's experience is more like witnessing history repackaged into flavourless fast food. ♦♦ Michael Atkinson

CREDITS

Produced by
Robert Redford
Greg Shapiro
Bill Holderman
Brian Falk
Robert Stone
Screenplay
James Solomon
Story
James Solomon
Gregory Bernstein
Director of Photography
Newton Thomas Sigel
Edited by
Craig McKay
Production Designer
Kalina Ivanov
Music
Mark Isham
Production Sound Mixer
Jonathan Gaynor
Costume Designer
Louise Frogley

©Conspirator Productions, LLC
Production Companies
The American Film Company presents in association with Wildwood Enterprises
Executive Producers
Joe Ricketts
Jeremiah Samuels
Webster Stone

CAST

James McAvoy
Frederick Aiken
Robin Wright
Mary Surratt
Kevin Kline
Edwin Stanton
Evan Rachel Wood
Anna Surratt
Danny Huston
Joseph Holt
Justin Long
Nicholas Baker
Colm Meaney
General David Hunter
Alexis Bledel
Sarah Weston
James Badge Dale
William Hamilton
Toby Kebbell
John Wilkes Booth
Johnny Simmons
John Surratt
Norman Reedus
Lewis Payne
John Cullum
Justice Wylie
Tom Wilkinson
Reverdy Johnson

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International UK & Eire

11,071 ft +8 frames

Countdown to Zero

USA 2010

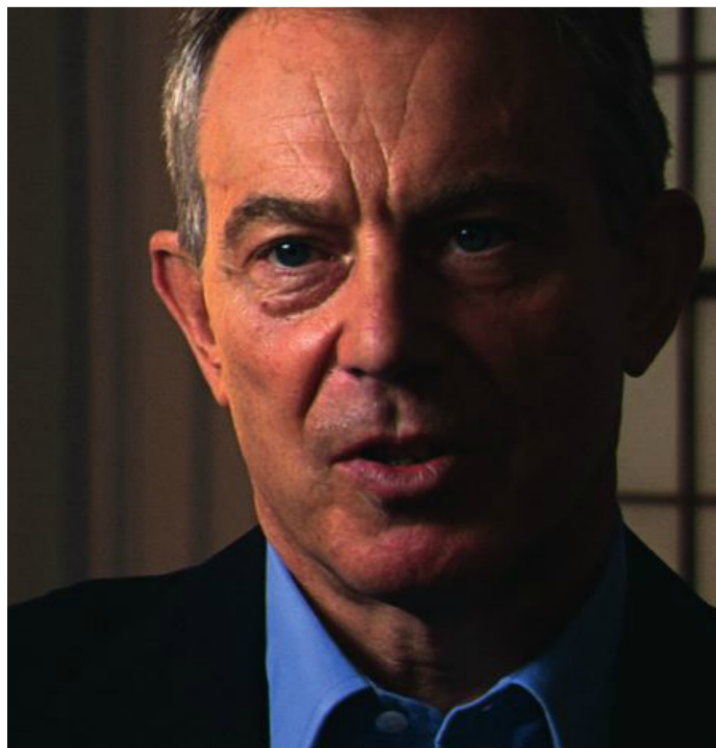
Director: Lucy Walker

There are moments when *Countdown to Zero* resembles nothing so much as a how-to manual for would-be nuclear terrorists. Want some uranium? Just knock the padlock off a Russian storeroom, as one wag did back in the 1980s. Planning to build the bomb? Google it. The basic materials are easy enough to come by if you've got a spare \$1 million knocking around. Smuggling the stuff into the US? Simple: hide it in a truck of kitty litter! Of course, you could take the easy route and go straight to a US base: until 1977 the launch codes were all set to a straight row of zeros which, as any mobile-phone handbook will tell you, is a basic security no-no.

Admittedly, glibness is an easy response to the terrifying catalogue of dreadful possibilities and near-misses that *Countdown to Zero* presents. So too is the ostrich approach: tellingly, while those members of the public who remember the Cold War shudder when asked if they worry about it by the filmmakers, the younger generation just shrug. "What can you do?" they ho-hum. The film sets out to combat such cauterisation, mainly by scaring the living daylight out of its audience. Taking their cue from a 1961 speech by JFK, in which he stated that mankind lives under a "nuclear sword of Damocles, hanging by the slenderest of threads, capable of being cut at any moment", director Lucy Walker and the unfortunately named producers Blair and Brown (Bruce and Matt, if you're wondering) structure their film into three acts: 'Madness', 'Accident' and

'Miscalculation'. If madness speaks to the possibility of rogue states or terrorists making the bomb, it is the possibility of human error raised by the latter chapters that emerges as most frightening, especially when one considers that of the 23,335 nuclear weapons in the world 22,400 belong to either Russia or the US. One of the film's most stomach-churning implications is that it might only have been a rare day of sobriety for Boris Yeltsin that kept us from nuclear war in 1995 when (the mind boggles!) someone forgot to pass on a message to the Russians that a scientific rocket was being launched off Norway and it was mistaken for a US attack. Protocol should have demanded a retaliatory attack within 15 minutes; Yeltsin refused to react.

As physicist Frank von Hippel comments, if the possibility of something happening isn't zero, eventually it will happen. The filmmakers pull no punches in making their case for total disarmament as security experts and scientists shake their heads at the fallibility of man, and CCTV footage shows bombs exploding in subways. We see sites of terrorist devastation in Bali, Riyadh, Oklahoma and Mumbai, and maps of the world's major cities repeatedly mark out the five-mile radius within which everything, even "the upper layer of the earth itself" would be vaporised. It all crescendos in a nightmarish montage of tipsy Times Square tourists counting down to New Year, set to a doom-laden litany of potential devastation (20-billion degree heat, 650-mile-an-hour winds, bleeding eardrums, skin stripped from bones). If the film risks tipping into hysteria here, it's counterbalanced by a cut to archive footage of Robert Oppenheimer, his gaze haunted as he quietly quotes from the *Bhagavad Gita*: "Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds."



The fallibility of man: 'Tony Blair'

SYNOPSIS The US, 1865. After the shooting of Abraham Lincoln, Mary Surratt, the owner of the boarding house in which the assassin John Wilkes Booth stayed, is arrested as a member of the conspiracy and set to be tried by military commission. After much political bandying, the young lawyer Frederick Aiken is assigned the task of defending her, despite his conviction of her guilt and his unwillingness to side with the assassins. Aiken struggles to discredit the state's witnesses, shift the onus on to Surratt's grown son and generally undermine the intent of the commission, which clearly wants only to hang every defendant and close the case, for the sake of the nation. Aiken becomes committed to his client, and his fervour affects his relationship with friends and fiancée.

The commission decides not to hang Surratt – but Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and the new president, Andrew Johnson, sign her death sentence anyway. She hangs, the first woman to be executed in the United States.

Of course, persuasive as all this is, it doesn't resolve the 'prisoner's dilemma' at the heart of the nuclear question. As a sombre Mikhail Gorbachev looks back with sadness at the aborted 1986 Reykjavik summit, he speculates that today's world leaders might have the gumption to succeed where he and Reagan failed. But the film's conciliatory coda fails to convince, and the question remains: who will be the first to lay down their weapons?

➡ Catherine Wheatley

CREDITS

Producer

Lawrence Bender

Written by

Lucy Walker

Cinematography

Robert Chappell

Gary Clarke

Bryan Donnell

Nick Higgins

Editors

Brad Fuller

Brian Johnson

Music/Music

Conducted by

Peter Golub

Sound Recording

Lucy Walker

Michael Boyle

Alexander Marshall

Evan McIntosh

Hashem Selph

©Nuclear Disarmament
Documentary, LLC

Production

Companies

Magnolia Pictures and

Participant Media

present in association

with World Security

Institute and The

History Channel a

Lawrence Bender

production

Executive Producers

Jeff Skoll

Diane Weyermann

Bruce Blair

Matt Brown

WITH

Gary Oldman

prologue voice

Interviewees

Valerie Plame Wilson

Graham Allison

Rolf Mowat-Larssen

Matthew Bunn

Lawrence Scott

Sheets

Oleg Khintsagov

Scott Sagan

SYNOPSIS A polemical documentary presenting the arguments for nuclear disarmament, structured according to three categories taken from John F. Kennedy's 1961 address to the United Nations General Assembly in which he claimed that nuclear disaster could be initiated by 'accident', 'miscalculation' or 'madness'. Tracing the history of the atomic bomb from its origins to the present state of global affairs, the film combines archive and CCTV footage with live interviews with experts and public figures including Mikhail Gorbachev, Jimmy Carter and FW. de Klerk. The film climaxes with a graphic description of the fallout of a nuclear bomb, before exhorting audiences to join the campaign for nuclear disarmament.

Diary of a Wimpy Kid Rodrick Rules

USA 2011

Director: David Bowers

Certificate U 99m 26s

As sure as night succeeds day, so a sequel follows Fox's modest 2010 hit *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. Like the first film, *Rodrick Rules* is live-action, periodically turning to animated brand-identification stick figures on a notebook-paper grid, the trademark of the films' source material, Jeff Kinney's bestselling 'visual novel' series – though the performance style is cartoonish throughout.

Zachary Gordon again portrays Greg Heffley, the 'wimpy kid' of the title, an unassertive, prepubescent pipsqueak diarist who directly addresses his adolescent concerns to the audience. Other returning cast members include Robert Capron as Greg's friend Rowley, flunking his showcase scene lip-synching for a viral video – though one looks forward to Karan Brar's very funny appearances as schoolmate Chirag. Devon Bostick plays Greg's bullying older brother Rodrick as a pop-eyed sociopath, given to prankery such as using a chocolate bar to create the illusion that Greg has soiled himself for an audience of their church congregation.

The church is cautiously non-denominational, car licence plates scoured of regional identity – *Rodrick Rules* unfolds in a bland landscape of mall, school, parking lot and retirement home. It's a tale of negotiating life in the suburbs in an era of ever-threatening YouTube public shaming, choosing among the designated paths of pop self-identification available. Rodrick papers his bedroom wall with grindcore band posters and idolises a feckless older guitarist (Fran Kranz), to the distress of straitlaced patriarch Steve Zahn (hamming).

During a sleepover, Greg and Rowley toss aside parent-vetted child-appropriate DVDs with titles like *Andy's Magic Cushion* in favour of an illicit horror movie called *The Foot* (the cover art a more effective gag than the fake movie-within-a-movie). Like them, the moviegoing parent picks from what's available. *Rodrick Rules* is no great shakes as filmmaking, but by virtue of not starring flutulent CGI critters or resuscitating a horrible TV franchise – a product amply viewable in the youth-marketed trailers

that will precede any screening – it's head of the kid-pics class, not thanks to evidence of genius, but because it's surrounded by dullards.

➡ Nick Pinkerton

Zachary Gordon

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www.wellcomecollection.org/screen

CREDITS

Produced by
Nina Jacobson
Brad Simpson
Screenplay
Gabe Sachs
Jeff Judah
Based upon the book by
Jeff Kinney
**Director of
Photography**
Jack Green
Film Editor
Troy Takaki
Production Designer
Brent Thomas
Music
Edward Shearmur
**Production Sound
Mixer**
James Kusan
Costume Designer
Tish Monaghan

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Film Corporation and
Dune Entertainment III
LLC (in all territories
except Brazil, Italy,
Japan, Korea and Spain)
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Limited Liability
Company, Twentieth
Century Fox Film
Corporation and Dune
Entertainment III LLC (in
Brazil, Italy, Japan,
Korea and Spain)
**Production
Companies**
Fox 2000 Pictures
presents a Color Force
production
Made in association
with Dune
Entertainment
Executive Producer
Jeff Kinney

CAST

Zachary Gordon
Greg Heffley
Devon Bostick
Rodrick Heffley
Rachael Harris
Susan Heffley
Robert Capron
Rowley Jefferson
Fran Kranz
Bill
Steve Zahn
Frank Heffley

Peyton List
Holly Hills
Karan Brar
Chirag
Grayson Russell
Fregley
Laine MacNeil
Patty Farrell
Connor Fielding
Manny Heffley
Owen Fielding
Manny Heffley

**Dolby Digital/DTS/
SDDS**
In Colour
Prints by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox
International (UK)

8,948 ft +6 frames



We are family: Roxanne Shaffer, Fletcher Norris, Jeffrey Harrison

Donor Unknown

Belgium/United Kingdom/The
Netherlands/Norway/USA 2010
Director: Jerry Rothwell

SYNOPSIS Suburban US, present day. Greg, the beleaguered prepubescent middle child of the Heffley family, is starting seventh grade at school. He develops a crush on classmate Holly, but his attempts to impress her are foiled by his own shyness and also by the sabotage of his older brother Rodrick.

Greg and Rodrick's mother tries to force the boys to be nice to each other, without success. The brothers eventually bond in a conspiracy against their parents: Rodrick throws a party when the parents leave town, and Greg helps him to cover up the aftermath before they return.

Rodrick briefly becomes a slacker mentor to Greg, but the détente ends when Greg cracks under pressure and reveals Rodrick's deception. As punishment, Rodrick is forbidden to enter his band, Löded Diper, in a local talent show. Greg negotiates a deal with his mother, agreeing to act in the embarrassing role of assistant in his friend Rowley's magic act if Rodrick is allowed to perform. Löded Diper are a hit, and an uneasy domestic peace is restored.

JoEllen Marsh, the twentysomething daughter of a lesbian couple, is determined to find out the identity of her sperm-donor father in this latest work from British documentary filmmaker Jerry Rothwell (*Deep Water, Heavy Load*). When she enters her donor's details – Donor 150 at the California Cryobank – in the database of the Donor Sibling Registry website, she discovers that she's one of many children conceived from his 'specimen'. Reading Marsh's story in the *New York Times*, Donor 150 reveals himself as free spirit Jeffrey Harrison, 'father' of four dogs and an injured pigeon, who earns his living giving massages here and there, and lives in an RV in Venice Beach in California – which, according to him, is "the last bastion of bohemian freedom in LA".

Rothwell introduces Harrison to some of his offspring early on, avoiding any attempt to build fake emotional tension around his identity. Eschewing formal and sentimental frills, *Donor Unknown* is by and large an engagingly unjudgemental documentary; its impact relies on the charm of its two main protagonists – the contagious

optimism of Marsh, but mainly the fragile demeanour of philosophic major and hippyish maverick Harrison, who wasn't slow in his twenties to discover the monetary advantages of semen donation, contributing a profuse 500 over the course of several years.

Somewhere between the awkwardness that springs up between donor and daughter in *Made in America* (1993) and the mild amusement afforded by Mark Ruffalo's character

in *The Kids Are All Right* (2010), *Donor Unknown* addresses questions to do with changing notions of the family, the need (or not) for a father figure, and indeed the increasing role of online social networks in our relationships and perceptions of the world. Nevertheless, for all its charm, a certain plainness in the telling suggests that this documentary would sit more comfortably on the small screen.

♦♦ Mar Diestro-Dópido

CREDITS

Produced by
Al Morrow
Hilary Durman
Filed by
Jerry Rothwell
Edited by
Alan Mackay
Composer
Max de Wardener
Sound Design
Vincent Watts

©ARTE G.E.I.E., Met
Film, Redbird
**Production
Companies**
Met Film and Redbird

present an Arte G.E.I.E.
and More 4 co-
production with VPRO
A film by Jerry Rothwell
With support from
Sundance Institute
Documentary Film
Program, Cinereach
Supported by the Gucci
Tribeca Documentary
Fund, The Wellcome
Trust, Yes Docu, NRK
A Met Film and Redbird
production for Arte
G.E.I.E. and More 4
with VPRO
Executive Producer
Jonny Persey

WITH

JoEllen Marsh
Danielle Pagano
Fletcher Norris
Rachelle Longest
Ryan McQuilton
Roxanne Shaffer
the siblings
Jeffrey Harrison
the donor
Lucinda Marsh
Joy Longest
Sue Norris
Cathy Fletcher
the parents

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Redbird Productions

SYNOPSIS A documentary following the story of JoEllen Marsh, a young American woman searching for her sperm-donor father. The daughter of two lesbians, JoEllen knows her father only as 'Donor 150' at the California Cryobank. She comes across the Donor Sibling Registry website, which can arrange contact between offspring of the same donor, and meets with some of her siblings. A newspaper picks up on the story; the article comes to the attention of Jeffrey Harrison – aka Donor 150. With two of her siblings, Roxanne and Fletcher, JoEllen meets Jeffrey in Venice Beach, where he lives with his four dogs in an RV.

Dum Maaro Dum

India 2011

Director: Rohan Sippy

Certificate 15 130m 18s

Films about crusading cops were a Bollywood staple in the 1970s and 1980s, and there have been notable Indian movies – *Hare Raama Hare Krishna* (1971), *Charas* (1976), *Jalwa* (1987), *Charas: A Joint Effort* (2004) – looking at the drugs trade. Rohan Sippy's third film (after the mediocre romance *Kuch Naa Kaho* and the *Nine Queens*-inspired *Bluffmaster!*) sees him combine these tropes and finally signal his arrival as a director of note. *Dum Maaro Dum* is a slick, stylish, violent thriller that races along for most of its length before hitting a roadblock caused by one too many twists and red herrings and an overlong climax.

SYNOPSIS Goa, India, the present. Vishnu Kamath is picked by the chief minister to eradicate the drugs trade from the state. Once a corrupt cop, Kamath reformed following the death of his wife and child in a road accident caused by a driver on drugs. Inspectors Mercy D'Costa and Rane assist Kamath in his mission. Kamath's main target is drug baron Lorsa Biscuita. Kamath arrests Lorry, a teenager who acts as a drugs mule for Biscuita, on his way to university in the US. Fearing for his family's safety, Lorry refuses to divulge information about Biscuita. Lorry's friend Joki agrees to help Kamath in exchange for Lorry's release if successful. Joki's ex-girlfriend Zoe, who was once a drugs mule for Biscuita, is arrested for possession of drugs; Biscuita uses his contacts to obtain her release, in exchange for her becoming his mistress.

Kamath's campaign hits the Goan drugs trade hard and soon all the drugs in the state are transferred to the custody of the mysterious Michael Barbossa. Zoe passes Joki information about Barbossa's whereabouts, and is killed by Biscuita's men. Barbossa is expected to show at a rave party across the state border; Kamath raids the party but finds no sign of Barbossa. Returning to Goa, Kamath tells Rane that he knows he's on Biscuita's payroll. Rane shoots Kamath dead. At the site of Kamath's murder, Joki sees Rane's name scrawled in blood. Joki realises that Barbossa isn't a real person – it is the name on a gravestone, and the drugs are hidden in the grave. Joki hides the drugs inside a crematorium, then calls Biscuita and gets him to use his connections to release Lorry in exchange for the drugs. Lorry is released, but it is too late for Biscuita to retrieve the drugs – they have been cremated along with Kamath's body. Shortly afterwards, Biscuita is killed by the mafia for whom he was holding the drugs.

Abhishek Bachchan, also the leading man in Sippy's previous films, plays Vishnu Kamath, a super-cop given extraordinary powers by the Goa administration to clean up the paradise state's notorious drugs trade – not unlike Eliot Ness in *The Untouchables* (1987). Sippy and his writer Sridhar Raghavan introduce in parallel the stories of drug mule Lorry, his friend Joki, and Joki's ex-girlfriend turned drug baron's mistress Zoe. These strands intertwine and finally settle into a relentless narrative in which Kamath pursues the drug lord and the mysterious Keyser Soze-like Michael Barbossa with missionary zeal. Sippy and Raghavan also manage to pay tribute to Tarantino by naming one of the characters Vincent Vega. Fuelled by a pulsating electronic score, *Dum Maaro Dum* charges towards what should be the finish line – but then meanders to a tame end with the laborious tying up of loose ends. Still, the ride till then, enhanced by editing flourishes reminiscent of Tony Scott in his pomp, is enjoyable enough.

For Bachchan, after recent misfires such as *Raavan*, *Khelein Hum Jee Jaan Sey* and *Game*, this is a return to form. He sinks his teeth into the role and delivers an energetic performance, even managing to belt out a rap number while despatching criminals with gusto. He also gets some zingy dialogue: when a terrified drug pusher begs for his life, promising information but not the location of the drug lord Kamath is pursuing, the cop shoots him point blank, saying, "For everything else there is Google." This then is Bollywood finally updated to modern times. But the old Bollywood rears its ugly head, providing the risible spectacle of Kamath seeing his dead wife and child in angel form, or the unnecessary and overlong musical numbers that act as speed breakers in an otherwise racy narrative. ➡ **Naman Ramachandran**

CREDITS

Producer
Ramesh Sippy
Screenplay
Sridhar Raghavan
Cinematography
Armit Roy
Editor
Aarif Shaikh
Art Director
Shazia Zahid Iqbal
Background Music
Midival Punditz
Lyrics
Jaideep Sahni
Anand Bakshi
Sound Designer
Manas Chaudhary
Costumes
Falguni Thakore

Production Companies
Fox Star Studios
presents a Ramesh Sippy Entertainment production
Executive Producer
Hussain Shaikh

CAST

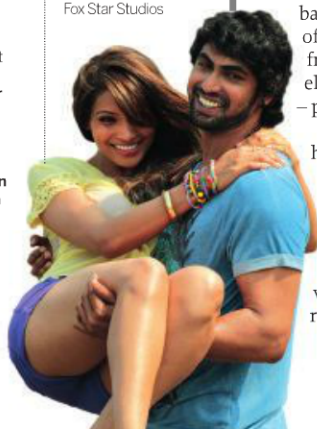
Abhishek Bachchan
ACP Vishnu Kamath

Bipasha Basu,
Rana
Daggubati

Aditya Pancholi
Lorsa Biscuita aka the Biscuit
Bipasha Basu
Zoe
Rana Daggubati
DJ Joki
Prateik Babbar
Lorry
Gantois Gomes
Govind Mande
Deepika Padukone
Anaita Nair
Mariah Pucu
Bugs Bhargava
Gulshan Devaia

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Fox Star Studios



Rio breaks: Paul Walker, Jordana Brewster

Fast Five

USA/Japan 2011

Director: Justin Lin

Certificate 12A 130m 9s

Ten years on from the original, *Fast Five* proves, if nothing else, that the producers of the latterly flagging *Fast and Furious* franchise have taken the wise decision to examine what made the original so successful and thus set about re-engaging with the videogaming predilections of their core young male audiences. Back in 2001, *The Fast and the Furious* made for the perfect cinematic accompaniment to the prevalent taste for console racing games such as *Gran Turismo*. Fast-forward ten years – and three toothless sequels – and such quaint redline thrills have long been outstripped by the vast, intricate and exotically framed likes of *Grand Theft Auto*. So it is that *Fast*

Five not only relocates from the backstreets of LA to the beaches of Rio, but shifts in essence from its drag-strip roots to an elaborately – if unimaginatively – plotted heist picture.

It's a canny move that looks to have saved the franchise's box-office bacon, but whereas previous instalments had the gleam and snarl of an array of muscle cars to fall back on, *Five* has to rely instead on the wherewithal of its cast and the rigour of its script – neither of

which has the finesse required to navigate the demands of the caper format. The cast are done few favours by third-rate tough-guy dialogue that's lacking either menace or humour but, even so, performances – save perhaps newcomer Dwayne Johnson's turn as a no-nonsense lawman – are notably underwhelming. And when a conglomeration of faces from previous films arrive to fill out the heist crew – themselves bringing nothing to the table, and generally so poorly employed that their presence smacks of an 11th-hour recall – one half expects the kitchen sink to follow.

But this is a movie that literally turns on its action sequences, and director Justin Lin and his editors have honed a very decent clutch of fights, chases and gun battles displaying a deliberate and precise grasp of the chemistry and geography of set-piece dynamics (though not their physics, a subject much abused throughout). Unfortunately, this theoretically welcome attention to detail snuffs out any of the spark of wit or bombast that sets a fire under such similarly ludicrous but far superior action fare as, say, Simon West's *Con Air* (1997). And if the style of these action sequences is something of a minor throwback, then their content is either nostalgic or simply amnesiac, with viewers invited to forget that they have already seen a parkour dash through the Rio favelas in *The Incredible Hulk*, the bank-vault twist to *Ocean's Eleven* and the climactic bridge chase from *True Lies*. ➡ **Adam Lee Davies**

CREDITS

Produced by
Neal H. Moritz
Vin Diesel
Michael Fottrell
Written by
Chris Morgan
Based on characters
created by
Gary Scott Thompson
Director of
Photography
Stephen F. Windon
Edited by
Christian Wagner
Kelly Matsumoto
Fred Raskin
Production Designer
Peter Wenham
Music by/Music
Conducted by
Brian Tyler
Sound Design and
Supervision
Peter Brown
Costume Designer
Sanja Milkovic Hays
Visual Effects
Pixomondo Visual
Effects
MPC
Hammerhead
Productions Inc.
Supervising Stunt
Co-ordinator
Mike Gunther
Stunt Co-ordinators
Troy Robinson
Spiro Razatos

©Universal Studios
Production
Companies
Universal Pictures
presents an Original
Film/One Race Films
production
In association with
Dentsu
Executive Producers
Amanda Lewis

Samantha Vincent
Justin Lin

CAST

Vin Diesel
Dominic Toretto
Paul Walker
Brian O'Conner
Jordana Brewster
Mia Toretto
Tyrese Gibson
Roman
Chris 'Ludacris'
Bridges
Tej
Matt Schulze
Vince
Sung Kang
Han
Dwayne Johnson
Luke Hobbs
Gal Gadot
Gisele
Tego Calderón
Leo
Don Omar
Santos
Joaquim de Almeida
Reyes
Elsa Pataky
Elena

Dolby Digital/DTS/
SDSS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International UK & Eire

11,713 ft +8 frames

UK poster title
Fast & Furious 5 Rio
Heist

SYNOPSIS Rio de Janeiro, the present. On the run from the US authorities, lovers Brian and Mia arrive in Rio where they meet an old criminal connection who lets them in on a job stealing high-end sports cars. Dom, another former associate, also arrives to take part in the theft. They steal the cars but Brian and Dom are captured by local crime lord Reyes and interrogated about the cars' whereabouts – Reyes implies that one of the vehicles contains something of great value. Brian and Dom escape, locate the car and find a computer chip detailing Reyes's money-laundering operation.

American DSS agent Hobbs and his team arrive to track Dom, Brian and Mia, who have now gathered together a team to steal \$100 million from Reyes. The three are soon arrested by Hobbs. Reyes's men attack the convoy taking them all to the airport for extradition, but only succeed in killing Hobbs's crew. In order to exact revenge, Hobbs joins Dom's crew.

Using cars and tow ropes, the gang steal Reyes's money by dragging a bank vault from the building in which it is stored. In the subsequent chase, Hobbs shoots Reyes dead and recaptures Dom and Brian – but sets them free with a 24-hour head start.

Months later, Brian and a pregnant Mia relax on a beach in the South Pacific. Dom arrives and challenges Brian to one last car race.

The First Grader

United Kingdom/
South Africa/France 2010
Director: Justin Chadwick
Certificate 12A 102m 56s

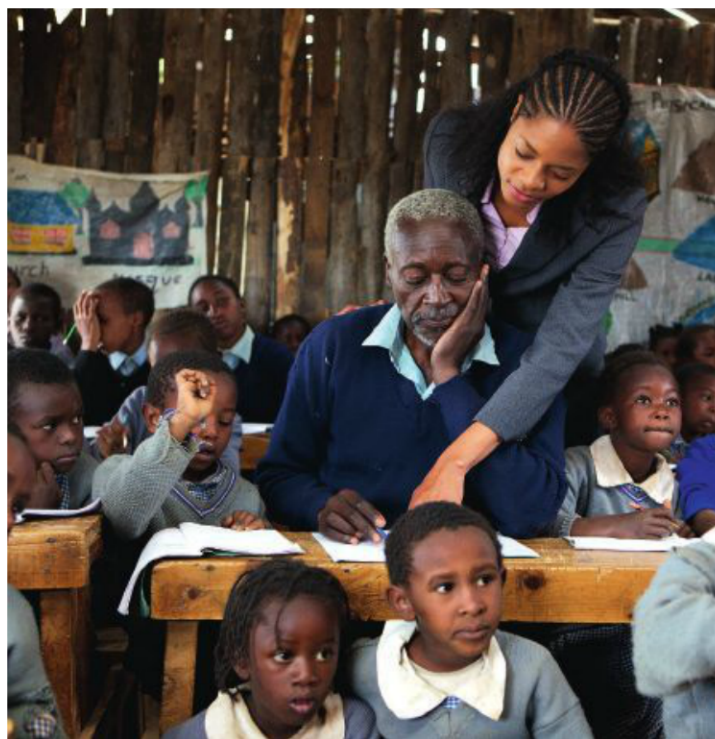
Unpredictable it's not. From the moment the indomitable octogenarian figure of onetime Mau Mau warrior Maruge shows up at the gates of the little Kenyan primary school insisting on his right to an education, you can see virtually the entire narrative arc of *The First Grader* coming at you with the grim clarity of a bullet train, dragging after it all the usual carriages: *Goodbye, Mr Chips*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Dangerous Minds* and the like. If the film escapes total banality – though skirting dangerously close to it on more than one occasion – it's largely thanks to its leads: a dignified, troubled performance from former TV anchor Oliver Litondo (in his first major screen role) as Maruge, and Naomie Harris appealingly warm, tenacious and nurturing as Jane Obinchi, the school's head teacher.

Director Justin Chadwick's insistence on shooting in Kenya itself, rather than the more contingency-friendly South Africa, and on using local Kenyan school kids to play Maruge's classmates, pays off handsomely in terms of texture and authenticity. The classroom scenes have a natural ebullience to them, an infectious sense of the children's delight in the learning process.

Unfortunately this sense of authenticity is undermined by the contrivances of the plot, most of which seem dropped in to provide nuggets of conflict in the overall triumphal flow. The minister's aide who menacingly demands a kickback when his boss's back is turned, the threatening phone calls to Jane and her husband, the group of thugs who show up at the school waving sticks (and are all too easily seen off by Maruge) – these episodes erupt and then vanish, leaving no aftermath. Dissent is brushed aside; anyone who suggests that having an 84-year-old man sitting in among a class of seven-year-olds might possibly have its downside is dismissively pegged as a fool or a villain.

Historically too the film begs a few questions. In unexpectedly brutal flashbacks we're shown Maruge's experiences at the hands of the British in 1953: tortured, mutilated, his wife and children murdered before his eyes. That these things were done by the colonial power is scarcely in doubt – but when Maruge and two companions raid a white settler's house to steal rifles, they simply leave the settler tied up on the kitchen floor; otherwise, all we get is a brief comment that "the Mau Mau killed people too". You can't help wondering how far this imbalance ties in with the involvement in the production of the Kenyan government, thanked in the end credits.

Chadwick's film tells an inspiring tale, and there are moments of undeniable emotional uplift. But too often it feels compromised by conventional narrative devices and



Back to basics: Oliver Litondo, Naomie Harris

by the nervous twitches of European liberal sensibility. And altogether it suffers by comparison with another recent, and far straighter Kenyan tale of the power of education, Jennifer Arnold's quiet, deeply felt documentary *A Small Act*. ➡ **Philip Kemp**

CREDITS

Produced by
David M. Thompson
Sam Feuer
Richard Harding
Producer Kenya
Mario Zvan
Written by
Anni Peacock
Director of
Photography
Rob Hardy
Film Editor
Paul Knight
Production Designer
Vittoria Sogno
Music by/Conducted
by

Alex Heffes
Sound Recording
Nico Louw
Costume Designer
Sophie Oprisano
©British Broadcasting
Corporation, UK Film
Council and First Grader
Productions Limited
Production
Companies
BBC Films and UK Film
Council present in
association with
VideoVision
Entertainment, Lip Sync
and ARTE France a
Sixth Sense, Origin
Pictures production

A Justin Chadwick Film
With the participation of
ARTE France
Developed by BBC
Films
Made with the support
of the UK Film Council's
Development Fund and
New Cinema Fund
Goldcrest Films
Executive Producers
Joe Oppenheimer
Norman Merry
Anant Singh
Helena Spring

CAST

Naomie Harris
Jane Obinchi
Oliver Litondo
Kimani N'gan'ga
Maruge
Tony Kgoroge
Charles Obinchi
Alfred Muryua
teacher Alfred
Shoki Mokgapa
teacher Elizabeth

Yusumuzi Michael
Kunene
Mr Kipruto
Agnes Simaloi
Agnes
Kamau Mbaya
Kamau Chege
Emily Njoki
young Maruge's wife
Lwanda Jawar
young Maruge
Daniel (Churchill)
Ndambuki
DJ Masha

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Soda Pictures

9,263 ft +9 frames

SYNOPSIS Kenya, 2004. The government promises free education for anyone who wants it. Jane Obinchi, head of a small primary school in the Rift Valley, is taken aback when an 84-year-old man, a former Mau Mau fighter called Kimani N'gan'ga Maruge, arrives and demands to be enrolled. She gently turns him away, but he repeatedly comes back. Finally, when he shows up wearing school uniform, she capitulates and lets him join the already overcrowded class, despite the misgivings of her husband Charles, who spends most of his time working in Nairobi.

The children, at first disconcerted by Maruge's presence, soon come to accept him. Maruge himself proves an eager pupil, though he is occasionally disturbed by flashbacks to the 1950s, when he was captured and tortured by the British and saw his wife and children killed. Mr Kipruto, a ministry inspector, arrives and angrily objects to Maruge's attendance in class. Jane at first defies him, accusing him of tribalism (Maruge is Kikuyu, Kipruto is not), but finally solves the problem by making Maruge a teaching assistant. Even so, Maruge's presence arouses hostility among local parents. Both Jane and Charles receive abusive phone calls; a group of men approach the school threatening violence but Maruge sees them off.

Kipruto has Jane transferred to another school 300 miles away. When a new head arrives, the children lock the gates and chase her off with missiles. Maruge, whose story has attracted the interest of Kenyan radio and the international press, travels to Nairobi and confronts the education minister and his aides. Jane is reinstated.

End titles tell us that Maruge was included in *Guinness World Records* as the oldest man to receive primary education, addressed the United Nations in New York, and died in 2009.

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Total Film

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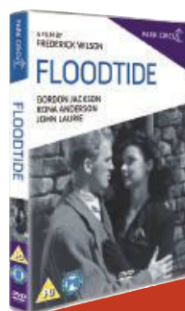
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ON DVD 13 JUNE



FLOODTIDE

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ON DVD 20 JUNE

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The Hangover Part II

USA 2011

Director: Todd Phillips

Certificate 15 101m 39s

The Hangover (2009) was massively profitable, thanks in no small part to its novel blackout-as-mystery premise. Well, relatively novel. There was a quite funny James Whale-directed movie from 1935, *Remember Last Night?*, with a similar plot, and more recently, *Dude, Where's My Car?* (2000)... the point being that a drugged, amnesiac culture gets the entertainment it deserves, hence this vacation to the Land of Smiles to re-enact the first film, which was good for a dumb laugh (if I remember right – I pay-per-viewed it while pie-eyed).

The central comic trio of Bradley Cooper, Zach Galifianakis and Ed Helms return as Phil (golf pro-handsome alpha), Dr Stu (milquetoast with a drunk dark side) and Alan (spoiled quasi-retard hipster shut-in). In one meditation-induced flashback-hallucination scene, all the principals are played by recognisable child stand-ins, which seems to endorse viewing the characters as variations on the man-boy, who has long replaced the taciturn westerner as the American male's favourite projected self.

More than ever as a diptych, the *Hangover* films suggest something more honest about middle-class male mores than the slacker-matured-by-the-love-of-a-good-woman narrative. Two thirds of 'the Wolfpack' (other third Alan's unwelcome nickname for the gang) are responsible adults, Phil married to a hilariously acquiescent wife, Stu about to be. The bachelor-party setting, following comedy's rule of extremes, stands in for a regular Jekyll-and-Hyde tradition, the diurnal cycle of letting loose and clear-headed clean-up.

Director Todd Phillips began what has become a phenomenally successful career in screen comedies with a documentary portrait of GG Allin, a pop-punk singer infamous for his masochistic, scatological stage act. This background put Phillips in a good position to cross over into the transgressive multiplex comedy sweepstakes, to which this instalment adds chicks-with-dicks and other delectations.

Otherwise, much of *The Hangover Part II*'s humour revolves around the complete indifference of the decadents abroad to their new, exotic surroundings. "I don't know, Asiatown?" says Phil when asked where they are. "What is this, a P.F. Chang's?" muses Alan while entering a Buddhist monastery (the reference is to a 'pan-Asian' US chain restaurant). As in the Vegas-set first *Hangover*, most of the Wolfpack's interactions involve an ethnically mixed criminal underworld – Bangkok is so little referred to for any but flyover-scenic purposes that one suspects the location was chosen for the ladyboy gag alone. I should add that Phillips *does* do very cool



High life: Bradley Cooper

musical parentheticals, also totally outside context, including an opening of scrolling helicopter shots over Bangkok set to a Glenn Danzig original. Is it funny? Alas, I was sober this time. **♥ Nick Pinkerton**

CREDITS

Produced by
Todd Phillips
Dan Goldberg
Written by
Craig Mazin
Scott Armstrong
Todd Phillips
Based on characters created by Jon Lucas, Scott Moore
Director of Photography
Lawrence Sher
Edited by
Debra Neil-Fisher
Mike Sale

Production Designed by
Bill Brzeski
Music
Christophe Beck
Sound Design and Supervision
Cameron Frankley
Costume Designed by
Louise Mingenbach

©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc., Legendary Pictures
Production Companies
Warner Bros. Pictures presents a Green Hat

Films production
A Todd Phillips movie
Executive Producers
Thomas Tull
Scott Budnick
Chris Bender
J.C. Spink

CAST

Bradley Cooper
Phil Wenneck
Ed Helms
Stu Price
Zach Galifianakis
Alan Garner
Justin Bartha
Doug Billings
Ken Jeong
Mr Chow
Paul Giamatti
Kingsley
Mike Tyson
himself
Jeffrey Tambor
Sid Garner

Mason Lee
Teddy
Jamie Chung
Lauren
Sasha Barrese
Tracy Garner
Gillian Vigman
Stephanie

Dolby Digital/DTS/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros
Distributors (UK)

9,148 ft +8 frames

Hatchet II

USA 2010

Director: Adam Green

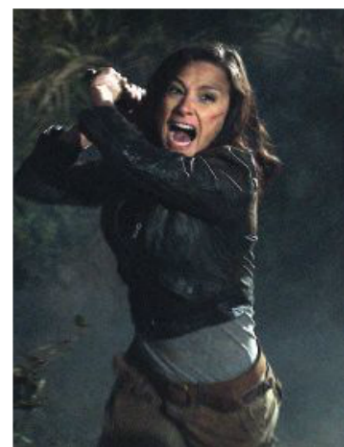
Certificate 18 85m 15s

Adam Green's last film was the slight but nifty ski-lift nightmare *Frozen* (2010), a three-hander which – following the tongue-in-cheek schlock of *Hatchet* (2006) – surprised with its relative restraint, minimalism and willingness to play things straight. If *Frozen*'s attempts at character development left something to be desired, then it's telling that this sequel's parade of slasher ciphers seems like a return to surer ground. We pick up immediately after the grisly events of *Hatchet*, with final girl Marybeth (Danielle Harris) having narrowly survived a massacre in the Louisiana bayou at the hands of wrathful undead monster Victor Crowley. Marybeth corners shifty Big Easy huckster Reverend Zombie (Tony Todd), the impresario behind the first film's ill-fated swamp tour, who corrals a dim-witted posse of hunters to aid her return to the cursed swamp to find the remains of her slain family – and bring back Crowley's head while they're at it.

Green has a bigger ensemble to work with here and he ramps up the gore accordingly, contriving some horribly inventive demises (not least a spectacularly grotesque instance of coitus interruptus). But in every other way, *Hatchet II* hews close to the blueprint of its predecessor. An outrageous opening is again followed by a leisurely New Orleans-based set-up, culminating in a final third of splatter back in the swamp. And for the uninitiated, Crowley's tragic past is reprised at length in flashback.

Might Green actually be satirising the overtly mechanical regurgitations of the horror franchise? There's certainly a sense that he's going through the motions, with a lethargic air to proceedings at points. The pervasive humour remains, careering between irreverent and puerile – but even that adds to the feeling of déjà vu. You wonder where Green will go from here; an abrupt close suggests he isn't finished with Victor Crowley yet.

♥ Matthew Taylor



Swamped: Danielle Harris

SYNOPSIS Thailand, the present. Phil, Stu and Alan have travelled from the US for Stu's wedding to Lauren. Stu takes every precaution to avoid the chaos experienced following their friend Doug's earlier bachelor party, but after a casual beer on the beach with Lauren's 16-year-old brother Teddy, the trio black out. They awaken in a dingy Bangkok hotel to find Teddy missing and drug dealer Mr Chow crashed on the floor. After Chow seemingly overdoses, taking his secrets with him, the boys set off after their charge, following a trail of clues that includes facial tattoos, a chain-smoking drug-running monkey and a ladyboy stripper. A miraculously resuscitated Mr Chow returns to chaperone them to a rendezvous with an international criminal, who claims to be holding the missing boy. This turns out to be a red herring – bait to catch Chow. The wedding seems destined to be cancelled but at the last minute Stu breaks a mental block and is able to lead them to Teddy. Racing by speedboat to the wedding, they're in time to watch Mike Tyson perform 'One Night in Bangkok' and view the previous night's pictures on a camaphone.

CREDITS

Produced by
Cory Neal
Producers
Sarah Elbert
Derek Curl
Written by
Adam Green
Director of Photography
Will Barratt
Editor
Ed Marx
Production Designer
Bryan A. McBrien
Original Score
Andy Garfield
Production Sound Mixer
Bobby Fisk
Costume Designer
Heather Allison
Stunt Co-ordinator
Kane Hodder

©MPI Media Group
Production Companies
Dark Sky Films presents
an ArieScope Pictures
production
Executive Producers
Adam Green
Andrew Mysko
Mark Ward
Malik Ali
Badie Ali
Hamza Ali
Greg Newman

CAST

Danielle Harris
Marybeth
Tony Todd
Reverend Zombie
Kane Hodder
Victor Crowley
Perry Shen
Justin
Tom Holland
Bob

R.A. Mihailoff
Trent
A.J. Bowen
Layton
Alexis Peters
Avery
Ed Ackerman
Cleatus
David Foy
Chad
Colton Dunn
Vernon
Rick McCallum
John

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Arrow Film Distributors
Ltd

7673 ft +0 frames



No teeth: Katerina Graham, Audrina Patridge

Honey 2

Director: Bille Woodruff
Certificate 12A 110m 29s

The common assertion that commercialisation and mainstream assimilation have killed hip hop finds prime illustration in *Honey 2*. The first *Honey* (2003) was proof enough – and Jessica Alba decamping from the franchise as its feisty namesake lead character only makes the terrain more dismal, though director Bille Woodruff returns to drive in another nail.

Katerina Graham steps in to star, as *Honey*'s former dance student Maria. Just out of junior detention, she's determined not only to eschew the criminal influence of her former boyfriend and dance crew the 718, but beat them in a dance-off heading the cleaner-cut HDs. Graham, whose background is in TV and back-up dancing, overdoes the sneering and posturing in trying for street attitude, but the plot drama is really only there to string together the dance routines in what's effectively an extended music video (the form on which Woodruff, unsurprisingly, cut his directing teeth).

SYNOPSIS New York, present day. On parole from juvenile detention and fostered by the mother of her former dance teacher Honey, Maria Ramirez takes a job in a grocery store and cleans the recreation centre where she previously took classes. Centre volunteer Brandon asks her to help train dance crew the HDs after seeing her moves in a club. Maria's former boyfriend Luis initially tempts her back into her old crew, the 718, but a brush with the law makes her realise that Luis hasn't changed his ways. She joins the HDs on condition they train for a TV dance contest and beat the 718 – the reigning champions. She and Brandon begin a romance.

The HDs make it through the contest auditions, though their confidence is knocked when they lose a street battle against the 718. Luis convinces HDs dancer Tina to quit and join his crew, but she returns after they involve her in a robbery. The two crews tie in the contest. The HDs win the tie-breaker dance battle. A closing sequence sees them returning from a sold-out world tour.

All comes to a head in a dance-battle between the crews, which sees the hip-hop tradition downgraded from a politically charged means of expression for disenfranchised minorities to a bitchy personal relationship squabble played out in TV-talent-show format. It's a scandalously insidious move – not least because Maria's new 'improved' romance is with white, wealthy college boy Brandon, a double-major in dance and finance. On a night stroll he exposes her to classical ballet (and, ludicrously, tango on a fountain ledge), which she adds to her routine, saying: "That's one thing I know the 718 doesn't have – culture."

A naive, moralistic plot-strand about a shoplifted bracelet likewise fails to acknowledge the social context of hip hop – that its romanticisation of law-breaking is rooted in social oppression, or that any aura of threat it has is complexly, intrinsically linked to its capacity to empower. The sequel's whitewash goes further than the original by having Audrina Patridge – star of MTV reality series *The Hills* – play a contest judge. If her airbrushed image embodies culture, the 718 should've taken their loss smiling.

➡ **Carmen Gray**
Credits for this film were unavailable at the time of going to press and will be published in a future issue.

Incendies

Canada/France 2010
A film by: Denis Villeneuve
Certificate 15 130m 56s

Incendies is our Film of the Month and is reviewed on page 54

CREDITS

Produced by
Luc Déry
Kim McCraw
Screenplay and Dialogue
Denis Villeneuve
With the collaboration of
Valérie Beaugrand-
Champagne
Based on the play by
Wajdi Mouawad
Cinematography
André Turpin
Film Editing
Monique Dantonne
Production Design
André-Line Beauparlant
Original Score/Music
Directed by
Grégoire Hetzel
Sound
Jean Umansky
Sylvain Bellemare
Jean-Pierre Laforce
Costume Design
Sophie Lefebvre

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Trinity Filmed
Entertainment

11,784 ft +0 frames

©Incendies inc. (a micro_scope inc. company), TS Productions sarl
Production Companies
Christal Films presents
a micro_scope
production
in co-production with TS
Productions and in
association with Phi
Group
With the financial
participation of Téléfilm
Canada, SODEC -
Société de
développement des
entreprises culturelles -
Québec, Tax Credit for
Film and Television,
Mini-treaty Canada-
France, Radio-Canada
Television, COGECO
Program Development
Fund, Super Écran and
The Movie Network,
CNC - Centre national
de la cinématographie,
Canadian Film or Video
Production Tax Credit,
The Harold Greenberg
Fund

CAST

Lubna Azabal
Nawal Marwan
Mélissa Désormeaux-Poulin
Jeanne Marwan
Maxim Gaudette
Simon Marwan
Rémy Girard
Jean Lebel, notary
Abdelghafour Elaaiz
Abou Tarek
Allen Altman
Maddad, notary
Mohamed Majd
Chamseddine
Nabil Sawalha
Fahim
Baya Belal
Maika



Cornered: Lubna Azabal

SYNOPSIS Quebec, the present. On the sudden death of his long-serving secretary Nawal, notary Lebel hands sealed envelopes to her daughter Jeanne and twin brother Simon. Nawal's funeral instructions are shocking: she is to be buried face down, naked, with no memorial or headstone unless certain conditions are met. The sealed envelopes are to be delivered by hand to their father, whom they understood to be dead, and an older brother they had no idea existed. Their task takes them to a fictionalised Middle Eastern country (nominally Lebanon) in search of their mysterious relatives. They discover that their mother was a Christian who fell in love with a Muslim; her family shot the father and put their baby in an orphanage. Nawal's hidden history unfolds in flashback to the 1970s and 1980s. As part of her quest to find her lost child, she joins Muslim paramilitaries and ends up shooting the leader of the Christian militia after being employed in his house as a French teacher for his son. She is sentenced to 15 years in prison, where she is tortured and raped by the sadistic Abou Tarek.

Simon and Jeanne learn that they are the product of these rapes – and realise the terrible truth. Back in Canada they confront Abou Tarek, now living under an assumed identity, and hand him both the letters. Abou Tarek, it turns out, is their half-brother as well as their father, who raped and impregnated his own mother.

Kaboom

USA/France 2010

Director: Gregg Araki

Certificate 15 86m 26s

Polysexual congress, murderous cults, drugs, incest, black magic and a teenage cast who would be rejected by Abercrombie & Fitch for excessive prettiness: *Kaboom* is just another day at the office for the writer-director Gregg Araki. Since helping to define the New Queer Cinema with his nihilism-for-dummies breakthrough hit *The Living End* (1992), he has knocked out a day-glo love letter to the West Coast's young and feckless every couple of years. With the exception of his one literary adaptation, *Mysterious Skin* (2004), these pictures have adhered to a demographic-flattering format incorporating far-out visual non sequiturs and cheap but cheerful hedonism.

Having made his 'Teenage Apocalypse' trilogy – *Totally F***ed Up* (1993), *The Doom Generation* (1995) and *Nowhere* (1997) – Araki addresses in *Kaboom* a literal apocalypse. Smith, a college freshman of 'undeclared' sexuality, witnesses a murder which prefigures the discovery that his father is an omnipotent cult leader poised to bring about the end of the world. Bummer.

The tone and production values suggest a mixture of daytime soap, gay porn and *Twilight* slash-fiction, but the film's greatest asset, as ever with Araki, is sincerity. Through all manner of hysterical incident, the characters remain touchingly true and consistent, more so than in a dozen more straitlaced coming-of-age movies, as they grope their way towards fulfilment. Smith anguishes over his attraction to his 'vag-etarian' surfer roommate while finding happiness in the arms of the perky female partygoer London and flirting with Oliver, a student who turns out to be a psychic undercover freedom fighter (isn't that always the way?).

It isn't exactly irrelevant that the world is ending, a headless corpse has been discovered in a dumpster and Smith is being stalked by men in animal masks (a bit of an in-joke alongside Araki regular James Duval, who also played Frank, the six-foot rabbit in *Donnie Darko* (2001), another teen-centred movie with an apocalyptic bent). But it's fair to say that *Kaboom* doesn't prioritise any of those elements over the commonplace preoccupations of its bed-hopping teens. What else should we expect from a movie in which the battle for humanity is between Smith and a cult called the New World Order, names that evoke Manchester's two greatest bands?

An aversion to the overblown can be found in the editing, which introduces detachment by framing some scenes in flashback as anecdotes recounted by characters. And it's there in the title, which might refer equally to the numerous orgasms or to the end of cinema forecast by Smith,



California dreamin': Chris Zylka

who observes that his film-studies course is like "studying an animal that's on the verge of extinction".

Nonchalant good looks can be enough to see an actor through most Araki films, so it's a bonus that Juno Temple, as London, brings screwball sassiness and killer timing. She is the recipient of Araki's fizziest lines ("I've had pelvic exams that lasted longer," laments London, climbing off a hopeless conquest) but she can also make the simple wearing

of a fez grounds for comparison with Judy Holliday. Temple delivers the picture's most inspiring speech, in which she explains patiently to an arrogant jock precisely how to improve his oral technique. This rare example in cinema of a woman instructing a man in the administering of pleasure is enough on its own to mark the film out as more responsible and empowering than any chaste Stephenie Meyer adaptation. •

► Ryan Gilbey

CREDITS

Produced by
Andrea Sperling
Gregg Araki
Written by
Gregg Araki
Director of Photography
Sandra Valde-Hansen
Editor
Gregg Araki
Production Design
Todd Fjelsted
Music Composed by
Ulrich Schnauss
Mark Peters
Vivek Maddala
Robin Guthrie
Sound Designer
Steven Avila

Costume Design
Tracy Gigi Field

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Production Companies
Why Not U.S.
Productions/Desperate
Pictures present in
association with Wild
Bunch + Super Crispy
the Gregg Araki movie
Executive Producers
Sebastian K. Lemerrier
Pascal Caucheteux
Jonathan Schwartz
Film Extracts
Un Chien andalou
(1929)

CAST

Thomas Dekker
Smith
Haley Bennett
Stella
Chris Zylka
Thor
Roxane Mesquida
Lorelei
Juno Temple
London
Andy Fischer-Price
Rex
Nicole LaLiberte
red-haired girl
James Duval
the Messiah

Brennan Mejia
Oliver
Kelly Lynch
Nicole
Carlo Mendez
Milo

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film
Company

7,779 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS California, the present. Smith, an 18-year-old college student, receives a card that reads: "You are the chosen son." After taking drugs at a party he has sex with a girl called London. Leaving her apartment, he collides with a woman who is being chased by men in animal masks. He sees her stabbed and later presumes that it was a hallucination, but is worried by newspaper reports about a headless female body. Later he meets a woman who resembles the supposed victim. Smith has sex on a nudist beach with a man called Hunter. London engineers a threesome with Smith and Rex, a friend of Smith's roommate Thor. Smith finds a website dedicated to the New World Order cult, the leader of which appears to be his dead father. London reveals that her own father was a member, and that she ingratiated herself with Smith in the hope of finding him. Smith survives an attack at his mother's house by the men in animal masks, and finds evidence that the cult has infiltrated the media and government; he also discovers that his father had many children, including London. The animal men, unmasked as Thor, Rex and Hunter, tell Smith that they are returning him to his father, which will precipitate the end of the world. While being pursued by a drug dealer called the Messiah, intent on stopping the New World Order, the animal men are apparently killed in a car crash along with Smith and London. Smith's father presses a red button, destroying the Earth.

Life in a Day

United Kingdom/USA/
Republic of Korea 2011
Director: Kevin Macdonald
Certificate 12A 94m 53s

Facilitated by YouTube, executive produced by Ridley and Tony Scott and directed by Kevin Macdonald, *Life in a Day* is touted as "a historic global experiment to create the world's largest user-generated film". Contributors around the world were invited to film their activities on Saturday 24 July 2010, and uploaded more than 80,000 videos, totalling some 4,500 hours of footage, from which the film distils its 95 minutes – a shooting-to-screen ratio to send even the most punctilious documentarist diving under their editing desk in despair. The temptation is to take *Life in a Day* at face value as a cutting-edge exercise that would be unthinkable without digital cameras and the internet. Much of the footage admittedly looks great, and the glimpses afforded of everyday life around the globe range from the domestic to the undeniably exotic: if goats are your cinephilic *bêtes du jour*, you should see the film simply for Boris Grishkevich's superb sequences featuring Ukrainian goat-herders. But the film's least interesting aspect is its technological novelty.

In organising the material, Macdonald claims to have been influenced by Mass Observation's documentation of everyday life in 1930s Britain, though this seems to go no deeper than asking contributors to respond to a few anodyne questions, such as, "What do you love most?" and "What's in your pocket or handbag?" In fact, *Life in a Day* is the contemporary expression of a tendency that dates back to the earliest years of cinema. Consider the alacrity with which Lumière and Pathé camera teams set out to capture images of the global quotidian and it's clear that one of the founding capacities of cinema was the ability to show the world to itself, a capacity periodically rediscovered with each generation. One of the most remarkable exercises in what could be called 'world picturing' took place between 1908 and 1931, when the French banker Albert Kahn despatched cameramen to record everyday life in more than 50 countries. Kahn's Archives of the Planet still exist and house what Paula Amad describes in her recent study as "an intimate visual stockpiling of the planet in the early 20th century". Kahn's positivist faith in the power of photographic and cinematic images to bring disparate cultures together in recognition of their shared humanity underwrites all such subsequent endeavours.

The differences between Kahn's project and *Life in a Day* are instructive. Both are exercises in archiving their contemporary presents – though one wonders if all the material submitted to Macdonald will be made available for future researchers, and in this respect *Life in a Day* can't help but be seen as a cinematic validation of the digital, a kind of 'best of' YouTube. And



The great leap forward: 'Life in a Day'

whereas Kahn's teams had to make the effort to travel to collect their material, the footage for *Life in a Day* travelled direct to Macdonald. Which raises an interesting issue, for in Kahn's time it wasn't only what his images showed that would have seemed unusual, but the fact of the image itself that was exotic. Today, however, the image is as common as a soiled coin, which produces a profound paradox in the handling of the material in *Life in a Day*.

On the one hand, there's the distinct sense of everyday footage being submitted to a process of cinematic magnification, so that the special something in a shot or sequence that truly scintillates can stand out: the extraordinarily beautiful face of a Arab child living in unspeakable squalor; the impressive juggling skills of an adept Indian drinks vendor; the serene blessings bestowed by an Asian woman on some office equipment. The examples are numerous and undoubtedly striking. On the other hand, there are moments when the images simply become indifferent montages of routines – getting up, going to the loo, etc – or resemble advertising sequences for a corporation that wants to ingratiate itself as a friend of the human family. Matthew Herbert's score doesn't help; alternating between saccharine singalong and bombast, it makes even Philip Glass's score to Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi* (1983) – another important cinematic exercise in 'world picturing' – sound restrained.

SYNOPSIS A documentary portrait of one day, from midnight to midnight on Saturday 24 July 2010, as it is lived by people around the world. Compiled from footage shot by the subjects themselves, the film takes in birth, death and a myriad of everyday actions.

Life in a Day also recalls 'The Family of Man', the famous photographic exhibition curated by Edward Steichen in 1955, which toured the world and was hugely successful. In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes wrote a powerful critique of the exhibition, describing how it subscribed to "this ambiguous myth of the human 'community', which serves as an alibi to a large part of our humanism". I'm as suspicious of the post-structuralist kneejerk anti-humanism exemplified by Barthes as I am of the fraudulent 'one-worldism' that Benetton once peddled, and one could say that, after the horrors of World War II and in the heat of the Cold War, 'The Family of Man' fulfilled a need for a unifying 'humanist' fiction of global community. *Life in a Day*, then, is both as valuable and as flawed in its own representation of present-day techno-humanism, in which its images of the contemporary 'family of man' iron out differences to proclaim similarity; there's little sense of where precisely the images come from, for instance. And, as for the contributors, while it's made up of their images, it's not their film. **Chris Darke**

CREDITS

Producer
Liza Marshall
Edited by
Joe Walker
Music
Harry Gregson-Williams
Matthew Herbert
Sound Designers
Glenn Freeman
Tom Sayers

©World in a Day Films
Limited
**Production
Companies**
YouTube and Ridley
Scott & Tony Scott
present a film made
possible by LG
A Scott Free Films
production

Executive Producers
Ridley Scott
Tony Scott

In Colour

Distributor
Scott Free

8,539 ft +8 frames

Mammuth

France 2010
Directors: Benoît Delépine,
Gustave Kervern

Don't be misled by the title. *Mammuth* is as slight and ephemeral as films come, a whimsical wisp of a film that feels as if, at any moment, it could disappear with the breeze. It will be a shame if it doesn't make an impact though, since it's one of the most tender and moving films to come out of Europe in recent years. And this despite the fact that it's filled with outrageous, sick-humoured moments, not least of which is the sight of two pot-bellied pensioners engaging in a spot of man-on-man mutual masturbation.

The hulking behemoth of the title is both Serge Pilardosse – a 60-year-old abattoir worker who discovers upon retirement that he has no pension – and the 1973 Münch motorcycle that he hauls out of his dilapidated garage in order to embark on a road trip to track down his former employers and the employment records he desperately needs. For the stringy-haired Serge the bike offers freedom from a life that quite literally cages him in (early in the film, we see him lumbering around his tiny bungalow like Dumbo's drugged mother) and a wife whose sarcastic disappointment is a constant whip. But as the doors of his confinement are opened, the memories are allowed in, and Serge is haunted not only by the ghost of a former girlfriend (a bizarre appearance from a frozen-faced Isabelle Adjani) but also by the brutal realisation of his impermanence and that of the world he inhabits. The places where he once worked have had to shut up shop or move with the times: a former mill has become a hi-tech animation studio whose disembodied receptionist tells him to check the (web)site for information ("But I'm at the site!" bellows a baffled Serge).

There are serious points being made here about ageing, and modernisation, and the French state. Serge never finished school; despite the fact that he has worked hard all his life he has nothing to show for it, and has been exploited throughout his career by the hardnosed businessmen who recognise a sap when they see one, as a devastatingly cruel encounter with a viticulturist underlines. Indeed, the opening slaughterhouse scenes, shot in grainy 16mm with a handheld camera, suggest a nod to the Dardennes. But as Serge's journey unfolds, the perspective takes on a rosy tint, and Gaëtan Roussel's jangly soundtrack puts one more in mind of young US directors such as Wes Anderson or Alexander Payne (there are obvious thematic overlaps with Payne's *Sideways* and *About Schmidt* here).

Mammuth's directors Gustave Kervern and Benoît Delépine have gained something of a cult status for their work in French television and for their films *Aaltra* (2004) and *Louise-Michel* (2008). It's taken three years for the latter to gain a theatrical release in the UK, so *Mammuth* follows



Cry freedom: Gérard Depardieu

◀ closely in its wake. Despite some snort-inducing cameos from Benoît Poelvoorde (*Man Bites Dog*) and Albert Delpy (*2 Days in Paris*), however, *Mammuth* lacks the caustic sting of the earlier film. The humour here is both fonder and more melancholy, carried on the vast shoulders of Gérard Depardieu as Serge and *Louise-Michel's* marvellous Yolande Moreau as his wife Catherine. Catherine is emotionally unhinged, physically grotesque (you

can rave all you want about the Isabelle Hupperts of this world, in Moreau we have an actress who really isn't afraid to take on grimy roles) and yet provides an unprecedented, and expected, emotional core to the film. By the end she is finally reunited with the stinky, sweat-drenched Serge, who surprises her in the act of shaving her flabby armpits. It's utterly lovely.

► Catherine Wheatley

CREDITS

Producer
Jean-Pierre Guérin
Screenplay
[un film de]
Benoît Delépine
Gustave Kervern
Director of Photography
Hugues Poulain
Editor
Stéphane Elmadjian
Art Director
Paul Chapelle
Music
Gaëtan Roussel
Sound
Guillaume Le Braz
Costume Designer
Florence Laforge

©GMT Productions, No

Money Productions,
Arte France Cinéma, DD
Productions, Monkey
Pack Films
Production Companies
A GMT Productions, No
Money Productions
production in co-
production with Arte
France Cinéma, DD
Productions, Monkey
Pack Films
With the participation of
Canal+, CinéCinéma,
Banque Postale Image 3
with the support of
Région Poitou-
Charentes,
Département de la
Charente, Département
de la Charente-Maritime
With the participation of

CNC
A film by Benoît
Delépine et Gustave
Kervern
Executive Producer
Christophe Valette

CAST

Gérard Depardieu
Serge Pilardosse,
'Mammuth'
Yolande Moreau
Catherine
Isabelle Adjani
the lost love
Miss Ming
niece
Benoît Poelvoorde
the rival
Bouli Lanners
recruiting officer
Catherine Hosmalin

Catherine's girlfriend
Blutch
pension fund employee
Philippe Nahon
hospice director
Anna Mougallis
woman pretending to
be disabled
Albert Delpy
cousin
Bruno Lochet
man in restaurant

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitled

Distributor
Axiom Films Limited

Mother's Day

Director: Darren Lynn Bousman

Certificate 18 112m 14s

"The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world." Those words from William Ross Wallace's poem have never been more pertinent than in Darren Lynn Bousman's version of the obscure 1980 slasher classic *Mother's Day*. What's more, it's almost as if Rebecca De Mornay's character from *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle* somehow reappears after 20 years, this time as the terrifying character Mother, with a family all of her own. In *Mother's Day*, her three infantilised 'boys' are running from the law after failing to rob a bank, one of them shot and wounded. When they seek refuge at Mother's home, it turns out it's been repossessed and is now owned by a yuppie couple in the throes of a birthday party. The messy consequences of this intrusion will require Mother's hyper-strict yet scarily polite intervention to straighten things out.

A loose homage to the original – though at times reproducing lines from it verbatim – *Mother's Day* in general keeps faith with the ludicrously overwrought violence of its source

material, if playing it a tad safer, gravitating more towards common home-invasion tropes familiar from the likes of *Straw Dogs* (1971), *The House on the Edge of the Park* (1980) or *Funny Games* (1997). Gruesome mind games, torture and random cruelty and violence abound, watched over and orchestrated by De Mornay, whose fully rounded and superbly interpreted Mother seems to have wandered in from another, altogether tighter and superior film.

Motivation for the escalating violence becomes increasingly unfocused as the dog-eats-dog workings become entangled with the pseudo-psychological reading of motherhood in extremis; the explanations derived from the quick succession of secrets and betrayals within the hostage group become, in the second part, the main motor moving the story forward. This – together with an ill-advised turn to melodrama, the forced attempt to give each of the characters a backstory, and the inclusion of the (not very effective) twist in the opening credits – ensures that the tight grip of this matriarchal psycho-horror thriller, unlike Mother's own, ultimately loosens well before the finale. ► Mar Diestro-Dópido

Credits for this film were unavailable at the time of going to press and will be published in a future issue.



Tory story: 'Mother's Day'

SYNOPSIS Kansas, the present. An imminent tornado is announced on the news. In a hospital, a newborn baby is kidnapped.

Siblings Addley, Johnny and Ike Koffin are running away after failing to rob a bank. Johnny has been shot in the chest, so they seek refuge at Mother's house, only to discover that it now belongs to Beth and Daniel Sohapi, who are at home celebrating Daniel's birthday with three other couples. The Koffins kidnap them and call Mother, who turns up with their sister Lydia. Mother explains that she lost the house in a foreclosure because she never received the money the siblings sent her. Convinced that Beth or Daniel is hiding the money they sent, the Koffins start torturing their friends. Ike takes everyone's credit cards to raise the money they need to cross the border safely. Virtually all Daniel and Beth's friends are killed. It transpires that Beth is pregnant and was keeping the money in order to leave Daniel (whom she correctly suspected of having an affair) and start a new life. She apparently kills Mother.

Fast-forward to the day of her child's birth. Mother abducts the baby with the help of Lydia and Johnny – the scene we witnessed at the beginning.

SYNOPSIS France, the present. After retiring from his most recent job at an abattoir, Serge Pilardosse discovers that none of his former employers has registered his earnings. Since he has no pay slips, he must obtain proof of each job in order to qualify for a state pension. His shrewish wife Catherine dispatches him to track them down on his Münch Mammuth 1973 motorcycle, a relic from his former days as a biker.

Serge visits gravedigger Dick, receiving papers in exchange for helping to dig up a coffin. At a bar where he was a security man he faces a hostile young bouncer but manages to steal the employment records. Other bars where he was employed are closed down. The mill where he once worked is now a hi-tech digital animation house. One former employer, a viticulturist, tells him he's stupid and useless. Throughout his travels, Serge is haunted by the memory of a former love, killed in a biking accident; we learn that he met Catherine when she stopped him from committing suicide in its wake.

After his cash and phone are stolen, Serge seeks lodgings at the lavish home of his estranged brother Jean-Luc, with whom he fell out over their inheritance. Jean-Luc is away but Serge is welcomed by his niece Solange, whose naive innocence revitalises him. The two form a close bond, and Serge is able to lay the ghosts of the past to rest. He sells his Mammuth and returns home on a scooter; Catherine tenderly welcomes him.

A coda sees him taking his baccalauréat in philosophy.

Pirates of the Caribbean On Stranger Tides

USA 2011

Director: Rob Marshall

Certificate 12A 136m 44s

Dumb, expensive and wildly successful, the *Pirates* franchise has powered through nearly a decade like a galleon in full sail. Despite their ridiculous plots, their repetitiveness and their regular critical mauplings, the films have been saved by two things: their utter lack of seriousness and the genuinely original and surprising characterisation of Captain Jack Sparrow by Johnny Depp.

It's hard to remember now that the studio once nearly pulled the plug on him, worried (and why wouldn't they be?) that his portrayal of their hero as an effeminate, slurring wreck might be somewhat off-message in the Disneyverse. Depp was quite right to argue that it would add a sharp tang to what is fundamentally a series of kids' movies based on a theme-park ride. That edge is badly needed in this latest incarnation, in which the plot, more than ever before, is shamelessly presented as a teaser for the forthcoming videogame.

And not for nothing does this latest plot revolve around the search for the Fountain of Youth; the whole edifice is getting somewhat elderly. While the franchise has always been a godsend for wrinkled character actors (Geoffrey Rush, Bill Nighy, Jonathan Pryce), Depp himself is now not far off 50. With the thirtysomething Penélope Cruz as his love interest, it's down to Sam Claflin (as pastel pastor Philip) and Astrid Bergès-Frisbey (as Syrena, the equally insipid mermaid with whom Philip falls in love) to represent the youthful limits of cynicism, where once we had Knightley and Bloom; and the latter's absence leaves a fatal emotional gap in a film that's already far too self-aware for its own good.

Pity these youngsters: it's in the pastor/mermaid subplot that we really taste the dregs of the *Pirates* story pot, and there were audible groans at the preview whenever the pair appeared. Clunkingly Christ-like, the pastor is *literally crucified* by evil Captain Blackbeard (Ian McShane) when we first see him; he later rises from the dead to save his beloved Syrena, who inexplicably gives up her traditional sailor-devouring habits after one glimpse of his halo/torso. Outside of the Jesus-besotted American Bible Belt, most audiences will struggle to understand what on earth they are doing in a film that purportedly celebrates the piratin' life. Much more interesting is the twisted relationship between Blackbeard and his long-lost daughter Angelica (Cruz) – a pair locked together in mutual distrust and greed – and that between Sparrow and his erstwhile first mate Barbossa (Rush).



And the ship sailed on: Johnny Depp, Ian McShane, Penélope Cruz

The film boasts a nice seam of imagery concerning glass and water, suggesting that the fantastical pirate world can only exist in a bubble that Sparrow constantly threatens to burst with his knowing asides and references to plot inconsistencies. Such nuances might have been more fully developed if the rush to the next chase sequence hadn't been so urgent.

It doesn't matter. Plenty of audiences will happily ignore the plot and concentrate on the 3D swordplay and naked mermaids. The franchise may yet sail on, even without Depp – who was reportedly unhappy, and looks it. "Did everyone see that?" Sparrow asks archly after a particularly spectacular stunt, "Because I will *not* be doing it again." I hope he doesn't. But someone else probably will. **✦ Lisa Mullen**

CREDITS

Produced by
Jerry Bruckheimer
Screen Story and Screenplay
Ted Elliott
Terry Rossio
Suggested by the novel
[*On Stranger Tides*] by
Tim Powers
Based on characters
created by Ted Elliott,
Terry Rossio, Stuart
Beattie, Jay Wolpert

Based on Walt Disney's
'Pirates of the
Caribbean'
Director of Photography
Dariusz Wolski
Film Editors
David Brenner
Wyatt Smith
Production Designer
John Myhre
Music
Hans Zimmer
Sound Designers
Shannon Mills

Christopher Boyes
Costume Designer
Penny Rose
Visual Effects & Animation
Industrial Light & Magic
Visual Effects
MPC
Cinesite
CIS Hollywood
Rising Sun Pictures
Method
Hy"drau"lx
Stunt Co-ordinators
George Marshall Ruge
UK:
Greg Powell

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Production Companies
Walt Disney Pictures
and Jerry Bruckheimer
Films present a Rob
Marshall film
Executive Producers
Mike Stenson
Chad Oman
John DeLuca
Barry Waldman
Ted Elliott
Terry Rossio

CAST

Johnny Depp
Captain Jack Sparrow
Penélope Cruz
Angelica
Ian McShane
Blackbeard
Geoffrey Rush
Captain Hector Barbossa

Kevin R. McNally
Joshamee Gibbs
Sam Claflin
Philip Swift
Astrid Bergès-Frisbey
Syrena
Stephen Graham
Scrum
Richard Griffiths
King George
Greg Ellis
Groves
Oscar Jaenada
the Spaniard
Keith Richards
Captain Teague
Roger Allam
Prime Minister Henry Pelham
Judi Dench
society lady

Dolby Digital/DTS/ SDDS
Colour/US prints by
DeLuxe
International prints by
Technicolor
[2.35:1]

Some screenings
presented in 3D
12,306 ft + frames
IMAX prints
137m 16s
197,671 ft

Distributor
Buena Vista
International (UK)

SYNOPSIS Captain Jack Sparrow has lost his ship the Black Pearl to evil magician Captain Blackbeard, and is in London to find a new ship and crew. He finds Barbossa, a former adversary turned ally, working for the Navy, which is trying to reach the legendary Fountain of Youth before the Spanish Fleet gets there. Sparrow meets Angelica, a former nun whose heart he once broke, who is impersonating him in order to raise a crew herself.

Escaping jail, Sparrow finds himself working on Blackbeard's ship; he discovers that Angelica is Blackbeard's daughter and first mate. In a series of swashbuckling episodes, Sparrow, Blackbeard, Barbossa and the Spanish try to assemble the magical items needed to access the Fountain of Youth, including a mermaid's tear. Blackbeard successfully captures a mermaid, Syrena; another of his prisoners, a missionary, takes pity on her and they fall in love.

Learning that Barbossa is determined to kill Blackbeard, Sparrow joins forces with him. Having reached the Fountain of Youth, Barbossa wounds Blackbeard with a poisoned sword, but also wounds Angelica. Sparrow tricks them into thinking that he is giving life-saving water to Blackbeard, but really gives it to Angelica. It is the last of the magic water: the Spanish have destroyed the fountain.

With Blackbeard dead and Angelica marooned on a desert island, Barbossa and Sparrow retrieve the Black Pearl and set out on a new life.

Planeat

United Kingdom 2011

Directors: Shelley Lee Davies, Or Shlomi

A self-funded feature debut from co-directors Shelley Lee Davies and Or Shlomi, *Planeat* is a gently persuasive campaigning documentary whose advocacy of a more holistic diet favours reasoned argument and empirical evidence over theatrical bombast and apocalyptic imagery. The filmmakers' argument pivots around research by three leading US scientists – clinician Caldwell Esselstyn Jr, geoscientist Gidon Eshel and nutritional biologist T. Colin Campbell – which establishes important links between diet and disease and underlines the environmental benefits of eating organic, plant-based foods rather than meat and dairy produce. All three underwent their own personal and professional conversions, and discuss them at length here.

The structure is simple, blending expert talking heads, statistics (often complemented by basic animations), a haphazardly applied voiceover, a couple of rudimentarily shot visits to organic farms and several assertions from assorted American restaurateurs (and Esselstyn's wife) that adopting the suggested diet need not be dull – complete with accompanying recipes. With so many American documentaries about the environment eager to posit the imminence of doomsday, *Planeat's* soft-pedalled approach comes as a relief. Davies and Shlomi aren't interested in lecturing the audience or labouring a point, though the glutinous score and voiceover occasionally patronise. Instead, they build their case gradually, letting facts and figures acquire a cumulative impact; unsupported assertions are rare. Shock tactics are entirely absent – this is a more philosophical, less visceral approach than 2008's *Food, Inc.* – and the film sidesteps the ethical dimensions; industrial farming, for example, is addressed in purely economic terms, with a few stills correctly deemed adequate to emphasise the grim conditions endured by the animals. But nor does *Planeat* offer a forum for debate – dissenting voices are entirely absent and the work of Campbell, Eshel and Esselstyn goes unchallenged.

The overriding message, however – that we should all take a little more responsibility for our diet – is a sound one and the running time agreeably lean. The case only flounders when applied to everyday life, as several American eateries flaunt their organic, carefully sourced wares. While the sequences are shot in a kinetic, lascivious style very familiar to any fan of primetime cookery programmes, no account at all is taken of what this change in diet might cost the average American consumer. This unpleasant reality may have proved even less palatable than one of Mrs Esselstyn's kale sandwiches.

✦ Lucy Dylan



Plant a seed: 'Planeat'

CREDITS

A film by
Shelley Lee Davies
Or Shlomi
Original Music
Ernie Wood
Sound Designer
Martin Schulz

@Studio at 58 Ltd
Production Companies
Studio at 58 and Dartmouth Films present a Studio at 58 production
Executive Producer
Christopher Hird

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Distributor
Studio at 58 Ltd.

SYNOPSIS A documentary promoting the nutritional and environmental benefits of adopting a plant-based diet. The film intercuts a combination of talking heads and statistics with reports from restaurants across America, where chefs discuss the diet and suggest favourite recipes. Three scientists put forward their arguments on the issue: T. Colin Campbell, professor of nutritional biology at Cornell University, addresses his decades of research establishing links between consumption of animal protein and liver cancer; Gidon Eshel, professor of physics and geosciences at Bard College, explains the potentially devastating effects of intensive dairy farming on biodiversity; and Caldwell Esselstyn Jr from the Cleveland Clinic reflects on his successful treatment of heart-disease sufferers after their conversion to a plant-based diet. The film ends by revealing Bill Clinton's partial conversion to the diet, apparently inspired by the research of Eshel and Campbell.

Point Blank

France/Spain 2010
Director: Fred Cavayé
Certificate 15 84m Os

Nothing to do with the 1967 Boorman-Marvin classic, this French thriller is still something of an old-school affair, harking back even further in time to the sort of sinewy, no-nonsense storytelling a Don Siegel or Phil Karlson might have recognised. Its story of an ordinary man running the gauntlet of crooks and crooked cops to rescue his kidnapped, pregnant wife is profoundly generic, the 84-minute running-time pared of anything resembling extraneous decoration. Writer-director Fred Cavayé certainly isn't trying to reinvent the wheel, but his facility for taking stock elements and playing fair with the audience while still generating breathless excitement and visceral impact is not such common currency in these days of ersatz shaky-cam zip and even shakier scripting.

In contrast to sundry Luc Besson-produced French thrillers, where the likes of the *Transporter* series or cult favourite *Taken* are rooted in a protagonist-as-crypto-superman conceit which allows for star-vehicle casting, the key to Cavayé's construction is the use of the protagonist-as-everyman to generate audience empathy and thus intensify the suspense. In his previous *Anything for Her* (remade by Paul Haggis as *The Next Three Days*), suburban schoolteacher Vincent Lindon was faced with the task of breaking his wife out of jail, whereas here the challenge is even more urgent – unless Gilles Lellouche's trainee nurse springs a patient from intensive care and delivers him to the villains, said bad lot will off his pregnant wife, whom they're holding captive at a mystery location.

Although it has Lellouche just about scrabbling his way over the first obstacle of exiting his workplace with injured patient Roschdy Zem in tow – cue hairy encounters with a police guard and a rather pompous doctor – the film is smart enough to realise he'll need some help squaring up to his ruthless opponents. An alliance with seasoned crook Zem (whose partner in crime is also held hostage by the same miscreants) shores up the story's credibility yet also effectively raises the tension another notch since the police now assume Lellouche to be a fugitive crim too. What with the male as rescuer of damsel in distress, the white hero's cool, ethnically differentiated helper and the inevitable bent cops in the mix, there's no shortage of clichés here, but we're rooting for Lellouche. His choices are stark – and Cavayé keeps them coming. Jump out of the window of an apartment to evade arrest, or risk his missus being killed? Run across the Paris Métro tracks in front of an oncoming train to lose an armed pursuer, or fail to save her? Lellouche copes well with the athletic demands of the role, and his pained you've-got-to-be-kidding look as crisis follows crisis brings an element of wit to the proceedings. True, we can't quite



Mission impossible: Gilles Lellouche

imagine that his wife won't make it to the end credits, but there's always sufficient doubt to keep us on our toes.

It's textbook genre film-making – at least partly because it has no aspirations to be anything else – and Klaus Badelt's score is unashamedly 'cop movie' music. Still, it would be wrong to discount the film as solely a deliciously effective mechanical exercise, since (as in *Anything for Her*) Cavayé does have some regard for the moral side-effects

of the gung-ho bish-bash-bosh. There's a surprise coda suggesting that Lellouche has crossed a line he can never un-cross. It's the only point at which the story's timeline jumps out of its slick linear progression, and as such it's a slightly awkward fit. Thematically, though, it's essential, and perhaps an indication that next time out Cavayé might even add more depth and ambiguity to his evident mastery of the nuts and bolts.

♥ Trevor Johnston

CREDITS

Produced by
Cyril Colbeau-Justin
Jean-Baptiste Dupont
Screenplay
Fred Cavayé
Guillaume Lermans
Director of Photography
Alain Duplantier
Editor
Benjamin Weill
Art Direction
Philippe Chiffre
Original Music
Klaus Badelt
Sound Recorder
Pierre Mertens
Costume Designer
Marie-Laure Lasson

©LGM Films, Gaumont.

TF1 Films Production,
K.R. Productions
Production Companies
Gaumont presents an LGM Films, Gaumont, TF1 Films Production, K.R. Productions co-production In association with Nexus Factory, U Films With the participation of Canal+, TPS Star

CAST

Gilles Lellouche
Samuel Pierret
Roschdy Zem
Hugo Sartet
Gérard Lanvin
Commandant Werner

Elena Anaya
Nadia Pierret
Mireille Perrier
Commandant Fabre
Claire Perot
Captain Susini
Moussa Maaskri
Captain Vogel
Pierre Benoist
Captain Mercier
Valérie Dashwood
Captain Moreau
Virgile Bramly
Captain Mansart
Nicky Naude
Captain Richert
Adel Bencherif
Luc Sartet

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor
Vertigo Films

7560 ft +0 frames

French theatrical title
À bout pourtant

SYNOPSIS Paris, present day. Fleeing after a bungled office break-in, Hugo Sartet is hit by a motorcycle and hospitalised. Samuel Pierret, a trainee nurse whose wife Nadia is pregnant, steps in to help after intruders cut Sartet's breathing equipment. Samuel is later attacked in his apartment and Nadia abducted. The kidnappers give instructions that Samuel must spring Sartet from hospital or Nadia will be killed. Samuel busts Sartet out of hospital and agrees to treat his wounds at a safe apartment; the two men then join forces to track down the villains, who are also holding Sartet's partner. A TV report revealing Sartet's criminal identity causes Samuel to give his location to police commander Fabre; she is shot by Werner, a colleague who is in league with the kidnappers. Samuel and Sartet flee, the latter realising that the office break-in was set up to frame him for the assassination of wealthy industrialist Francis Meyer, who was in fact murdered by Werner's corrupt cops. Discovering that the corrupt cops now have Nadia, Sartet and Samuel head to the police station, where Sartet aims to prove his innocence by stealing a surveillance video of Meyer's murder. Sartet obtains the evidence, exposes Werner's crimes and escapes. Samuel is reunited with Nadia, who goes into labour.

Years later Samuel is at home with his growing family when TV news announces Werner's suicide while on Christmas leave from prison: Sartet, he realises, has had his revenge.

Potiche

France/Belgium 2010

Director: François Ozon

Certificate 15 102m 46s

François Ozon's oeuvre has, broadly speaking, oscillated between two modes: camp and severity, though there have also been cases of camp severity (*Water Drops on Burning Rocks*, 2000) and severe camp (*Angel*, 2007). *Potiche* is his most unmitigatedly camp exercise since 2002's *8 Women*, but beneath its frothy surface this is a film of considerable seriousness. It adapts its theatrical source material, a 1980 boulevard farce, to reveal changes in sexual attitudes over 30 years, and ends by effectively proposing a manifesto for mainstream feminist politics (the film was partly inspired by Ségolène Royal, the defeated socialist candidate in the 2007 French presidential elections).

But Ozon is also very serious here about style. *Potiche* aims at a playful, ironic recreation of a bygone stage manner, rather as Alain Resnais did in his 1920s pastiche *Pas sur la bouche* (2003) – but Ozon does it with much greater precision and grace. The performances are choreographed to the last gesture, every actor moving in an entirely distinctive and precisely signifying manner – from the exuberant, matronly heft of Catherine Deneuve's tracksuited jogging, through the increasingly effete tics of Jérémie Renier's 'artistic' son, to Judith Godrèche's entrance tossing a sumptuously backlit Farrah Fawcett mane.

The meticulous *mise en scène* is exaggeratedly stagey; characters are artificially lined up in groups before the camera, and when Suzanne (Deneuve) storms out after a tiff you expect to hear the applause of a matinee audience. Retro touches include round-edged split-screen panels, red-and-yellow credits and knowingly arch incidental music – all of which might, for UK viewers, suggest a British TV comedy spin-off of the period. From a French perspective, the theatricality might recall an early 1970s Deneuve vehicle, *A Slightly Pregnant Man* – though a superior Jacques Demy collaboration is alluded to in the umbrellas made at the factory run by Suzanne's husband Robert.

The casting against type is inspired. It's fun to see Dardennes regular Renier let his hair down (or rather up), while Fabrice Luchini abandons his patrician highbrow mannerisms to play Robert, superbly, as the sort of patriarchal boor once routinely incarnated by Jean Yanne. But Ozon's masterstroke is the casting of Deneuve and Depardieu (the latter plays Maurice, the communist MP with whom Suzanne once had a fling) in their seventh pairing. Their first wasn't until 1980 in Truffaut's *The Last Metro*, but a jokey flashback to a youthful tryst represents an inspired fantasy of the actors as if they had co-starred much earlier. A young Suzanne, in floral flounces, recalls the Deneuve of *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort* (1966) with Maurice as the



An autumn tale: Catherine Deneuve, Fabrice Luchini

Depardieu of *1900* (1976). The duo are on gamely self-mocking form, cheerfully flaunting their autumnal stoutness in a disco routine. Depardieu – husky, tender and alert – turns in one of those rare latterday performances that, like his lead in Xavier Giannoli's *The Singer* (2006), shows he really thought it was worth turning up.

As for Deneuve – in a role originally played by the foghorn-voiced, altogether more proletarian Jacqueline Maillan – she only rarely gets to have fun on screen, but here she does in spades. A *potiche* is translated in the subtitles as a 'trophy wife', though the word doesn't necessarily imply glamour – a totem or passive accessory might be nearer the mark. But Deneuve does bring glamour to the role; she's game for the cartoonish aspects of the naive, hidebound Suzanne before she comes out of her shell by taking over the running of her husband's firm, and Ozon fondly but tartly exploits the singular combination of domesticity and quasi-regal dignity that makes his star so beloved in France.

Characteristic Ozon themes abound, not least his habit of putting older women in the limelight. Another Ozon leitmotif is sexual serendipity: the film reveals that the young Suzanne asserted independence through a series of erotic encounters (shot with a nod to the Just

Jaekins school of soft porn). Freed from Robert's domination, she's again hot to trot: cue Sergi Lopez's cameo as a likely looking trucker.

The period setting (1977, three years before the play) affords plentiful cultural in-jokes, even a sublime throwaway gag about Eurovision scoring. But by using this museum piece in more or less original form (an addition is the slightly inert final act, as Suzanne turns to politics), Ozon illuminates our understanding both of the period and of our own attitudes, rather as *Mad Men* does with its perspective on the early 1960s. We may recoil at the comic overstatement of Robert's routine humiliation of Suzanne, but we can also imagine a 1980 audience getting a frisson of mild satiric revelation. Ozon shows how bourgeois comedy, for all its conservatism, nevertheless packages social change for mainstream audiences, in palatable taster form.

Ozon boosts the play's radicalism by highlighting its feminism (Suzanne ends by proclaiming an "era of Amazons") and through the 'queering' of Laurent, whose unseen fiancée (and possibly, sister) becomes a running joke through the film – climaxing in the revelation that he may now have embarked on an incestuous relationship with his illegitimate brother.

With Suzanne's political apotheosis providing a musical curtain call for Deneuve, *Potiche* sends us out on a high. Even so, British viewers might have reason to balk at the idea of a political matriarch proclaiming herself mother to the nation – especially at the dawn of the 1980s, and in a platinum helmet hairdo. ♦♦ Jonathan Romney

CREDITS

Produced by
Éric Altmayer
Nicolas Altmayer
Scenario, Adaptation and Dialogue
François Ozon
Freely adapted from the play by [Pierre] Barillet & [Jean-Pierre] Grédy
Photography
Yorick Le Saux
Editor
Laure Gardette
Art Director
Katia Wyszkop
Music Composed, Orchestrated and Directed by
Philippe Rombi
Sound Recordist
Pascal Jasmes
Costume Designer
Pascaline Chavanne

©Mandarin Cinéma, Foz, France 2 Cinéma, Mars Films, Scope Pictures
Production Companies
Mandarin Cinéma presents a co-production with Foz, France 2 Cinéma, Mars Films, Wild Bunch, Scope Pictures with the participation of Canal+, TPS Star, France Télévisions, Région Wallonne in association with La Banque Postale Image 3, Cofinova 6, Cinéma 4, Soficinéma 6
With the support of Tax Shelter du Gouvernement Fédéral de Belgique

CAST

Catherine Deneuve
Suzanne Pujol
Gérard Depardieu
Maurice Babin
Fabrice Luchini
Robert Pujol
Karin Viard
Nadège
Judith Godrèche
Joëlle Pujol
Jérémie Renier
Laurent Pujol
Sergi López
truck driver
Évelyne Dandry
Geneviève Michonnet
Bruno Lochet
trade unionist
Elodie Frégé
young Suzanne
Gautier About
young Babin
Jean-Baptiste Shelmedrine
young Robert

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Optimum Releasing

9,249 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Sainte-Gudule, France, 1977. Suzanne Pujol is the wife of Robert, the tyrannical director of her late father's umbrella factory. When a strike begins, Robert's secretary and mistress Nadège announces that he has been taken prisoner by the workers. Suzanne persuades local mayor and communist MP Maurice Babin – with whom she once had a fling – to intervene. Robert tells Suzanne that he disapproves of their son Laurent's engagement to a local girl, whom he suspects may be his own illegitimate child. When Robert takes a leave of absence, Suzanne agrees to run the factory; with the workforce now supporting her, she revitalises the business, with Laurent as designer.

On his return, Robert ousts his wife in a boardroom coup, backed by their conservative daughter Joëlle. Thinking Suzanne has betrayed the workers, the heartbroken Maurice rejects her. Suzanne stands against Maurice as MP; triumphant at the polls, she declares herself a mother to her supporters.

Priest

USA 2011

Director: Scott Stewart

Certificate 12A 87m 20s

If you'd not seen a film since 1977 – and Scott Charles Stewart's absurdly derivative steampunk western-horror hybrid would much prefer it if you hadn't – then a viewing of *Priest* would be akin to supping from the endless dayglo drip-tray of big-budget, SFX-driven cinema that has pooled together since *Star Wars*: you might get a good bellyful, but the experience could put you off for life.

A loose adaptation of a long-running South Korean *manhwa* comic (itself inspired by 1990s PC videogame *Blood*), *Priest* follows Paul Bettany's titular high-kicking cleric on a paint-by-numbers quest across the sun-baked outlands of an alternate future Earth to rescue his niece from a marauding strain of mutant hybrid vampires that threaten the walled cities into which humanity has retreated. The result is a heroically hopeless appropriation of Indiana Jones's mysticism, Peter Jackson's monsters and Joseph Campbell's monomyths – calls to adventure, supernatural aid, speeder-bikes and all! Nods to Leone's grander western parables also abound across the retrograded post-apocalyptic *Mad Max* 'Weird West' backdrop, but lacking in either the cynical wit or soapy sentiment of Sergio Leone's spaghetti, such references will be as baffling to those who pick up on them as they will be for the uninitiated.

And yet for all the hodgepodge of lower-to-middle-browed allusions and blasé copycatting, the feeling persists that this is a missed opportunity rather than an embarrassing failure. Whether it is by dint of budgetary constraints or simply a chronic lack of ideas, the possibility of a return to 90-minute, three-act simplicity that *Priest* hints at will please many in an era when blockbusters such as the recent *Pirates of the Caribbean* outings have too often confused 'epic' with 'lengthy and confusing' when clocking in at two-and-a-half hours. *Priest* is stripped down and lean enough, but when there's so little meat on the bones then whatever pickings that remain need more seasoning than Cory Goodman's first

draft of a script ever musters.

Paul Bettany – an actor one continues to root for despite the mounting evidence – brings a certain gravel and physicality to the role of the warrior priest (think kung-fu Clint in a cassock) and there's a canny cameo from Stephen Moyer – the Southern-fried Lestat of TV's *True Blood*. *Priest* also benefits from some excellent production design from Richard Bridgland. And while director of photography Don Burgess – who also worked on that other bleach-blasted Bible-based brawler *The Book of Eli* – might want to think about branching out sometime soon, *Priest* does at least bask in a pleasingly desaturated desert glare.

None of this good running, however, manages to outpace the drear fog of an ill-executed 3D presentation, a gaggle of truly uninspired and risibly amateur special effects and a leaden and ultimately unforgettably plagiaristic script. **Adam Lee Davies**

CREDITS

Produced by
Michael De Luca
Joshua Donen
Mitchell Peck
Written by
Cory Goodman
Based on the graphic novel series *Priest* by Min-Woo Hyung
Director of Photography
Don Burgess
Editor
Lisa Zeno Churgin
Production Designer
Richard Bridgland
Music
Christopher Young
Sound Designers
Martin Jacob Lopez
Jussi Tegelman
Costume Designer
Ha Nguyen
Visual Effects & Stereoscopic Management
The Creative Cartel
Visual Effects
Tippett Studio
Svengali
Spy, a Fotokern Company
Spin
Iloura
The Senate
Zoic Studios
Gradient Effects
Stunt Co-ordinator
Lance Gilbert

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Production Companies
Screen Gems presents
a Michael De Luca
Productions/Stars

Road Entertainment
production
In association with
TokyoPop
Executive Producers
Glenn S. Gaior
Steven H. Galloway
Stu Levy
Josh Bratman

CAST

Paul Bettany
Priest
Karl Urban
Black Hat
Cam Gigandet
Hicks
Maggie Q
Priestess
Lily Collins
Lucy Pace
Brad Dourif
salesman
Stephen Moyer
Owen Pace
Christopher Plummer
Monsignor Orelas
Alan Dale
Monsignor Chamberlain
Mädchen Amick
Shannon Pace

Dolby Digital/DTS/ SDDS
In Colour
Prints by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Some screenings
presented in 3D
Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing

7,860 ft +0 frames



Squeaky clean: Aimee Teegarden

Prom

USA 2011

Director: Joe Nussbaum

Certificate U 103m 37s

Hot on the heels of a surge of successful films and TV shows tackling the American high-school experience – most recently *High School Musical* and *Glee* – Joe Nussbaum's comedy-drama *Prom* shows us a typical senior class as they prepare for that most monumental of occasions. Prom-president Nova is devastated when the decorations she has spent months building are destroyed and she is forced to enlist the school's resident bad boy's help to rebuild them. At close quarters, the pair develop feelings for one another but must overcome their prejudices before the film can reach its inevitably upbeat conclusion.

The film has a sweet (if unrealistic) message, envisioning the school prom as a great equaliser rather than a hormonal hotbed of angst and insecurity. But whereas offerings from the past decade or so (starting with the *American Pie* films) have sought to satirise the genre somehow – with suggestiveness, gross-out comedy, singing or sex, for instance – *Prom* has none of the subversive self-reflexivity of its predecessors. Though dialogue is at times sharp and witty, the characters barely fill out the most stereotypical of moulds, with even bad boy Jesse proving to be little more than the sum of his leather-wearing, class-skipping parts. Indeed, without the faintest hint of naughtiness – not even a knowing wink when the beautiful Mei, unable to find a suitable dress, suggests she might wear "nothing" to the prom – most of the film's relationships fail to convince.

Vapidity aside, however, *Prom* does exactly what it sets out to, and it's unlikely that its pre-teen target audience will balk at a lack of sex and irony. **Chloe Roddick**

CREDITS

Produced by
Justin Springer
Ted Griffin
Written by
Katie Wech
Director of Photography
Byron Shah
Film Editor
Jeffrey M. Werner
Production Designer
Mark White
Music by/ Orchestrations and Arrangements by
Deborah Lurie
Sound Mixer
Steve Morantz
Costume Designer
Shoshana Rubin

©Disney Enterprises, Inc.
Production Companies
Walt Disney Pictures
presents a Rickshaw
production
Executive Producer
Samson Mücke

CAST

Aimee Teegarden
Nova Prescott
Thomas McDonell
Jesse Richter
De'Vaughn Nixon
Tyler Barso
Daniel Campbell
Simone Daniels

Yin Chang
Mei Kwan
Jared Kusnitz
Justin Wexler
Nolan Sotillo
Lucas Amaz
Cameron Monaghan
Corey Doyle
Kylie Bunbury
Jordan Lundley
Joe Adler
Rolo
Janelle Ortiz
Ali Gomez
Jonathan Keltz
Brandon Roberts
Nicholas Brawn
Lloyd Taylor

Dolby Digital/DTS/ SDDS
Colour by
DeLuxe
US prints by
DeLuxe
International prints by
Technicolor

Distributor
Buena Vista
International (UK)

9,325 ft +8 frames

SYNOPSIS An alternative, post-apocalyptic Earth. Vampires and humans have long been at war. A band of warrior priests, led by a man known only as Priest, investigate a vampire hive only to be ambushed and have one of their number abducted. Some years later, the war has ended and most of mankind has retreated into walled cities, while the few remaining vampires are confined to desert compounds. Discarded by the church, Priest is shunned by society. When news reaches him that his brother has been killed and niece Lucy taken captive by vampires, Priest breaks his vows by leaving the city in order to find her. Accompanying him is young sheriff Hicks, who is in love with Lucy. Priest warns Hicks that if he finds Lucy infected he will kill her, even though, as he eventually reveals, she is in fact his own daughter. Meanwhile the abducted priest – now known as Black Hat – has become the first human-vampire hybrid and has amassed a new vampire army to overcome humanity. Together – and later with the help of a rogue priestess – Priest and Hicks attempt to stop Black Hat's armoured train full of larval vampires from reaching the city. During a fight aboard the speeding train, Hicks rescues Lucy and Priest kills Black Hat. The priestess blows up the speeding train. Lucy, Hicks, Priest and the priestess are thrown free of the crash. The vampires all die in the wreck.

SYNOPSIS A high school in the US, present day. When the prom decorations are accidentally destroyed in a fire, class president Nova is forced to enlist the help of troublemaker Jesse to rebuild them in just three weeks. Other students – prom king and queen Jordan and Tyler, perfect couple Mei and Justin, hapless romantic Lloyd, joker Rolo and sophomores Corey, Lucas and Simone – also prepare for the big night. Nova and Jesse develop feelings for one another. On prom night, everyone comes together. Jesse arrives just in time to sweep Nova off her feet.

Putty Hill

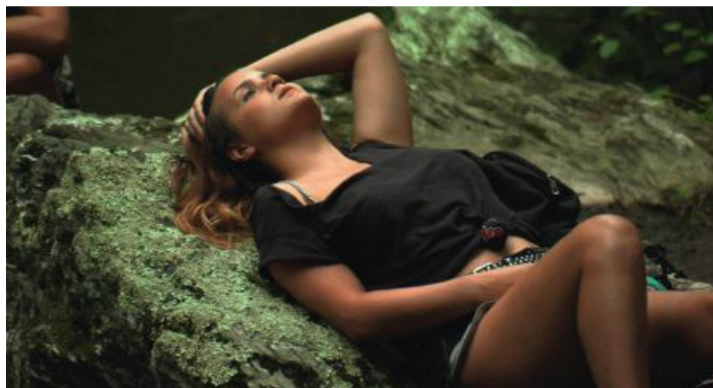
USA 2011

Director: Matt Porterfield

Towards the end of *Putty Hill*, a teenage girl speaks of her childhood obsession with drawing silhouetted trees: "They're so intricate, but simple at the same time." It's a neat encapsulation of the achievement of this film, which acknowledges at once the vastness and complexity of human feelings and the simple need for connection. Scenes of everyday life are beautifully muted and natural, yet via the device of an off-camera interviewer, director Matt Porterfield is able to hint at his characters' deeper feelings and concerns.

Whether the interviewer actually 'exists' within the film's physical reality is a point for discussion – certainly no one else is visible in the back of the taxi from which Jenny subsequently conducts one of her interviews; but nor is the interviewer a mere psychic projection with unmediated access to his subjects' thoughts. Rather, it's as if Porterfield has provided these various damaged souls with the empathetic, knowing friend any lonely person might yearn for; and like any friend, the interviewer experiences them only as they choose to present themselves. Caught at various stages of adolescence and young adulthood, his interviewees are in the midst of developing their grown-up personae. Some raw feelings can't be concealed, but others are masked by faux-toughness or bravado. Like a teenage diary, the interviews are both honest and constructed; the disruption of a sudden death provides an opportunity to glimpse the mechanics by which a self is constructed, by which spontaneity and self-protection come to coexist. Improvised dialogue, and the blending of on- and offscreen names and relationships further complicate the boundaries between documentary 'truth' and fictional 'storytelling'. It's a thought-provoking approach in an age when the TV watched by kids like those we see here consists largely of multi-camera 'reality' shows in which names are real but events manipulated, emotions feigned and conversations scripted.

Screwing with the concept of documentary reality in film is nothing new, of course – witness recent hybrids such as *The Arbor*, *Catfish* and *Exit Through the Gift Shop* – and formal experimentation is only part of *Putty Hill*'s appeal. Its most striking element is the interest it displays in its characters, and the dignity it affords them. In its acknowledgement of the validity and reality of teenage life experience, it recalls some of the more recent work of Gus Van Sant, particularly *Elephant* (2003) and *Paranoid Park* (2007). Neither holy working-class innocents nor passive, tabloid-scary receptacles for all society's psychic detritus, Porterfield's kids are vulnerable, creative, complex, and trying to be good. James is unwilling to be drawn on the details of his brother Cory's death, but his glance



A rock and a hard place: Zoey Vance

at the camera when a pretty girl sits down next to him after a paintball game speaks volumes about his hormonally fraught time of life. Jenny's storm of tears on discovering her ex-con ex-stepfather surrounded by weed-smoke expresses a heartbreaking truth about the adolescent negotiation of boundaries: how to establish and live by them when adult authority figures flout the rules at every turn? Yet teenagers are also shown to have their own sources of self-respect and hope. As in *Paranoid Park*, youthful dedication to the art of skateboarding is presented as significant and worthy of respect. "Everybody's good here," says skater Cody of his park buddies. "We all feed off each other, learn stuff from each other." The networks of pernicious influence that have led to Cory's untimely death have a positive mirror image in the lines of friendship and family support that sustain the community and that are given moving expression in a funeral scene which displaces open emotional displays into karaoke performances and awkward dancing. What might have been a mawkish emotional climax in another film – frail Jenny's adept cover of Dolly Parton's 'I Will Always Love You' – is rendered funny and endearing by supportive heckles and shy self-interruptions.

The impact of a young person's death on a family and a community has been a standard indie trope since *Ordinary People* (1980) – the Sundance programme heaves each year with stories of post-bereavement dysfunction and recovery. *Putty Hill* gives the formula a kindly, ambiguous new twist, forgoing angsty melodrama in favour

of an effort to show how grief is managed by people who don't go in for self-analysis or Oscar-worthy acting out. Lush cinematography by Jeremy Saulnier finds occasion for ravishment in shady dosshouses and dappled forest glades alike, while birdsong, bursts of cello music and the buzz of the tattooist's needle provide a fragile, evocative soundscape.

➡ **Hannah McGill**

CREDITS

Produced by

Jordan Mintzer
Steve Holmgren
Joyce Kim
Eric Bannat

Story

Matt Porterfield
Jordan Mintzer
Cinematography

Jeremy Saulnier

Edited by

Marc Vives

Art Direction

Sophie Toporkoff

Location Sound

Phil Davis

Costume Design

Sara Jane Gerrish

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Production Companies

The Hamilton Film Group

A Hamilton Film Group production in association with Cloud Society

Made possible through a grant from IFF and Panasonic

CAST

Sky Ferreira

Jenny, Cory's cousin

Zoe Vance

Zoe, Cory's oldest sister

Charles 'Spike' Sauers

Spike, Cory's uncle

James Siebor

James, Cory's brother

Dustin Ray

Dustin, Cory's best friend

Cody Ray

Cody, Dustin's brother

Cathy Evans

Cathy, Cory's mom

Virginia Heath

Virginia, Cathy and Spike's mom

Jeff Ichniowski

Jeff, man who gets tattooed

Ian Burke

Ian, Cory's friend

Joe Mooney

Joe, a friend of the family

Casey Weibust

Casey, Zoe's best friend

Drew Harris

Geoff, Cory's neighbour

In Colour

[1.78:1]

Distributor

ICA Films

Scream4m

USA 2011

Director: Wes Craven

Certificate 15 110m 49s

'You forgot the first rule of remakes,' Neve Campbell tells a new Ghostface murderer after delivering a devastating (though temporary) comeback with a set of cardiac paddles, 'never fuck with the original.' It's one of the smarter lines in Kevin Williamson's script, but shows up a blurriness in the film's conception.

In keeping with the way *Scream 2* (1997) made jokes about sequels and *Scream 3* (1999) poked fun at trilogies, *Scream4m* has a smattering of weak jabs at the practice of remaking horror movie franchise cornerstones. Director Wes Craven retains a producer credit on recent redos of his own back catalogue, so he might be inclined to take it easy on the trend. However, it's not a remake but a reboot, an example of that most ludicrous of all categories, 'the fourth part of the trilogy'. The run of reboots for the likes of the *Die Hard*, *Rambo* or *Predator* franchises – Williamson himself worked on the *Scream*-influenced *Halloween H2o Twenty Years Later* reboot – which would seem to leave an open goal for post-modern mockery. However, there's nary a dig at the return of now-ageing leads (and creatives) to signature roles after other career options haven't panned out, or the even the cutesy business of fitting a numeral into the text in the title (shouldn't there be a sequel to *Stab*, the made-up film series within *Scream*, called *Stab2*). An onset of conservatism is signalled by the sneering at successor trends: aside from one mention of *Saw*, this doesn't acknowledge any post-*Scream* horror franchise so there are no jokes about torture porn or 3D. There are almost grudging updates, but little is made of the murderer streaming crimes on the internet (already done in a couple of films, including *My Little Eye* and *Untraceable*) and, crucially, it builds to a revelation Williamson seems to think is a twist which is actually a trope (deployed more cuttingly in *All the Boys Love Mandy Lane*).

Craven, whose 3D *My Soul to Keep* (his first directorial credit in nearly ten years) went straight to DVD in the UK, can still set up and deliver a stalk-and-scare sequence, though this has fewer jump moments than the earlier *Screams*. It pulls plot elements together better than *Scream 3*, the only entry not scripted by Williamson, and does deliver a matched pair of knife-to-the-gut moments, using the film-within-a-film-within-a-film prologue (featuring Anna Paquin and Kristen Bell amusingly cast as teenagers) to foreshadow the cruelest, most affecting twist late in the day. While Campbell only emerges as the linch-pin in a lengthy hospital coda (a riff on both versions of *Halloween II*) and David Arquette and Courteney Cox bicker as comedy relief, the pick of the newcomers are Hayden Panettiere (very fresh in the 'Rose McGowan' part, rattling off a list of remakes to befuddle the prank-calling film buff), Rory Culkin ➡

SYNOPSIS Teenager Cory has died of a drug overdose. Those visiting his Baltimore hometown for his funeral include his cousin Jenny and his older sister Zoe. At a paintball game in the forest, his younger brother James talks to an unseen interviewer about their family. Tattooist Spike – Cory's uncle and Jenny's ex-stepfather – talks to a client about Cory's death and his own troubled history. Zoe talks to the interviewer about her life, until her friends arrive to collect her. James's friend Cody returns home after paintballing; his mother plays him a song she's written. The interviewer talks to Dustin, a jail friend of Cory's, about trying to go straight. At her friend Ashley's house, Jenny watches TV and talks about the coming funeral. The interviewer speaks briefly to Ashley's brother Jeff. Zoe hangs out at a diving hole with her friends; one boy carves Cory's initials into a tree. Jenny visits her grandmother in an old people's home. Cody is interviewed at the skate park about his community of friends; a skater sprays "Rest in Peace Cory" on a wall. In a taxi, Jenny talks to the interviewer about her family life. Arriving at Spike's house, she finds a roomful of visitors smoking weed; she cries on the porch, and Spike tries to talk to her. Cory's funeral features speeches and karaoke. Jenny sings 'I Will Always Love You'. Zoe and her friends drive to the house where Cory lived, and visit the room where he died.



Death of the author?: Neve Campbell

➔ (who thinks he knows who he's playing in the killer's remake, but is wrong) and Marley Shelton (a herring so red she should be back with more revelations in further instalments).

➔ Kim Newman

CREDITS

Produced by
Kevin Williamson
Iya Labunka
Wes Craven
Written by
Kevin Williamson
Based on characters created by Kevin Williamson
Director of Photography
Peter Deming
Editor
Peter McNulty
Production Designer
Adam Stockhausen
Music
Marco Beltrami

Sound Design
Todd Toon
Don Malouf
Costume Designer
Debra McGuire
Visual Effects
Prime Focus
Stunt Co-ordinator
Troy Brown

©The Weinstein Company/LLC
Production Companies
Dimension Films
presents in association with Corvus Corax and Outerbanks
Entertainment production

A film by Wes Craven
Executive Producers
Bob Weinstein
Harvey Weinstein
Ron Schmidt
Ehren Kruger
Matthew Stein
Cathy Konrad
Marianne Maddalena
Film Extracts
Shaun of the Dead (2004)

CAST

Neve Campbell
Sidney Prescott
Courteney Cox
Gale Weathers-Riley
David Arquette
Sheriff Dewey Riley
Emma Roberts
Jill Roberts
Hayden Panettiere
Kirby Reed
Rory Culkin
Charlie Walker
Anthony Anderson
Deputy Perkins

Adam Brody
Deputy Hoss
Mary McDonnell
Kate Roberts
Marley Shelton
Deputy Judy Hicks
Nico Tortorella
Trevor Sheldon
Marielle Jaffe
Olivia Morris
Kristen Bell
Chloe
Anna Paquin
Rachel
Erik Knudsen
Robbie Mercer

Dolby Digital/DTS/ SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

9,974 ft +1 frame

Senna

USA/United Kingdom/France 2010

Director: Asif Kapadia

Certificate 12A 105m 53s

Senna is a skilfully constructed and moving documentary which transcends the sports-movie clichés it initially seems to embrace. Its portrayal of Formula 1 legend Ayrton Senna is closer to what you'd expect from a film about a doomed rock star or actor rather than a racing driver, but although the tone occasionally verges on the hagiographic, director Asif Kapadia (*The Warrior, Far North*) successfully conveys the contradictions in the young Brazilian's personality: a strange combination of charm and messianic zeal, Senna was charismatic, good-looking and ferociously intense. He competed ruthlessly and – some of his opponents claimed – recklessly, and took his religion as seriously as his driving.

The footage in *Senna* is primarily taken from TV broadcasts, on-car cameras and home movies, most of it from the pre-digital, pre-HD era. Blown up to the big screen, the imagery has a strangely hazy, fuzzy quality, but the subtlety of the editing gives the film a cinematic pace and feel very different to that of a conventional small-screen documentary. It's hardly a spoiler to point out that most viewers will know what happened to Senna: killed in a freak accident (never really satisfactorily explained) at the San Marino Grand Prix in 1994. The knowledge that the film is building towards its protagonist's death gives it an air of foreboding that's in stark contrast to the brashness and noise of the motor racing itself.

Senna was nothing if not inscrutable,

and Kapadia and his screenwriters are sensible enough not to try too hard to crack the mystique. Biographical details are kept skimpy – we're told that he was from an affluent background, and we see his family in home-movie footage – but it's as a driver that he is of interest and the film concentrates almost exclusively on this part of his life. What the filmmakers make very clear is that he fully understood the money and politics behind Formula 1 and yet somehow was able to retain his childlike love of racing for its own sake. Interviewees testify to his intellect – evident in footage of him at driver's meetings or in press conferences – and the F1 surgeon Professor Sid Watkins also talks of his humility and essential decency. Kapadia makes it clear that he was a folk hero to working-class Brazilians.

What is almost impossible to surmise is why Senna was so relentless in his pursuit of Formula 1 glory. Watkins suggested to him after a fellow driver was killed that he quit and spend his life fishing instead – never an option the Brazilian could take seriously. "Why do you dance?" Moira Shearer's ballerina is asked in *The Red Shoes*. "Why do you live?" is her response. That, one guesses, is what Senna might have said if pressed as to why he drove.

Compared to gruff Brits such as Nigel Mansell and Damon Hill, or even the German perfectionist Michael Schumacher (whose career was on the rise at the time of Senna's death), Senna seems an infinitely richer and more complex personality – you can see why storytellers cast him in a mythic light. The footage of his funeral evokes memories of Valentino or JFK.

On camera in old interviews, Senna talks about the life he hopes to have after racing. But racing absolutely defined his life – it was all he knew and all he wanted to know. Just occasionally,



Fast track: Ayrton Senna

SYNOPSIS Sidney Prescott, survivor of three killing sprees by murderers who wore a distinctive outfit and terrorised victims with prank phone calls, has written a book about getting back on track. She returns to Woodsboro, California, her home town and site of the first murders, to publicise the book, reuniting with fellow survivors Sheriff Dewey Riley and his ex-newswoman wife Gale Weathers-Riley. The murders start again, with victims drawn from the social circle of Sidney's teenage cousin, Jill Roberts. Gale, resentful at Sidney's literary success, tries to involve herself in her husband's investigation in the hope of writing a sequel to her book about the earlier murders, and is seriously injured by an attack at a marathon screening of all seven films based on the crimes. At the after-party, Sidney has déjà vu as Jill and her best friend Kirby are seemingly terrorised by prank calls, Jill's ex-boyfriend Trevor shows up suspiciously, and film geeks Robbie and Charlie expound the rules of rebooting or remaking a franchise. Kirby is momentarily attracted to Charlie, but gets suspicious when he asks to be let into the house after Robbie has been stabbed – allowing him to be taken by the masked figure. Kirby bests the killer at horror movie trivia and frees Charlie, who stabs her to death. The new murderers are Jill and Charlie, recreating the original crimes so Jill – who takes the trouble to kill Trevor and Charlie – can become as famous as her cousin. Jill stabs Sidney and injures herself to make it seem as if she has survived a killing spree perpetrated by Trevor and Charlie. In hospital, Dewey tells Jill that Sidney has survived. Jill leaves her bed to try and kill the only person who can reveal her guilt. Sidney beats Jill and saves Gale and Dewey.

the film is heavyhanded and corny in making this point, using lachrymose music and audio interviews in which family members and observers see religious symbolism in his death. This may be far-fetched but Senna was such an enigmatic figure that Kapadia's documentary still makes fascinating viewing. It should even appeal to those who couldn't care less about the noisy circus that is Formula 1.

► **Geoffrey Macnab**

CREDITS

Produced by

James Gay-Rees
Tim Bevan
Eric Fellner

Written by

Manish Pandey

Cameraman

Interview Crew:
Jake Polonsky

Editors

Gregers Sall
Chris King

Music by/Percussion/

Guitar/Bass/

Keyboards/Drums

Antonio Pinto

Sound Recordists

Dan Zimmermann
Sam Braga

©Universal Studios

Production

Companies

Universal Pictures
presents in association
with StudioCanal a
Working Title
production in
association with Midfield
Films

Made with the
co-operation of Instituto
Ayrton Senna

Executive Producers

Kevin Macdonald
Manish Pandey
Debra Hayward
Liza Chasin

WITH

John Bisignano
Ron Dennis
Reginaldo Leme
Alain Prost
Neyde Senna
Viviane Senna
Pierre van Vliet

SYNOPSIS A biographical portrait of Brazilian Formula 1 racing star Ayrton Senna. Using TV footage, home movies and contemporary audio interviews, the film tells how the young Senna came to Europe to race on the go-kart circuit and announced himself as a Formula 1 driver with an astonishing performance at a rainswept Monaco Grand Prix.

Moving to Lotus and then McLaren, Senna established himself as one of the top drivers in F1. At McLaren, his rivalry with fellow driver Alain Prost grew increasingly bitter. Senna went on to win three world championships and became a hero in Brazil. Though from an affluent background, he made clear his affection for the Brazilian people, many of whom were living in poverty under a political leadership they detested.

In 1994 Senna signed for Williams Renault. He had difficulty adapting to its car, and had a fatal crash at the San Marino Grand Prix. His funeral was a national event in Brazil.

Professor Sid Watkins
Sir Frank Williams
Richard Williams

Dolby Digital/DTS
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor

Universal Pictures
International UK & Eire

9,529 ft +8 frames

A Separation

Iran 2011

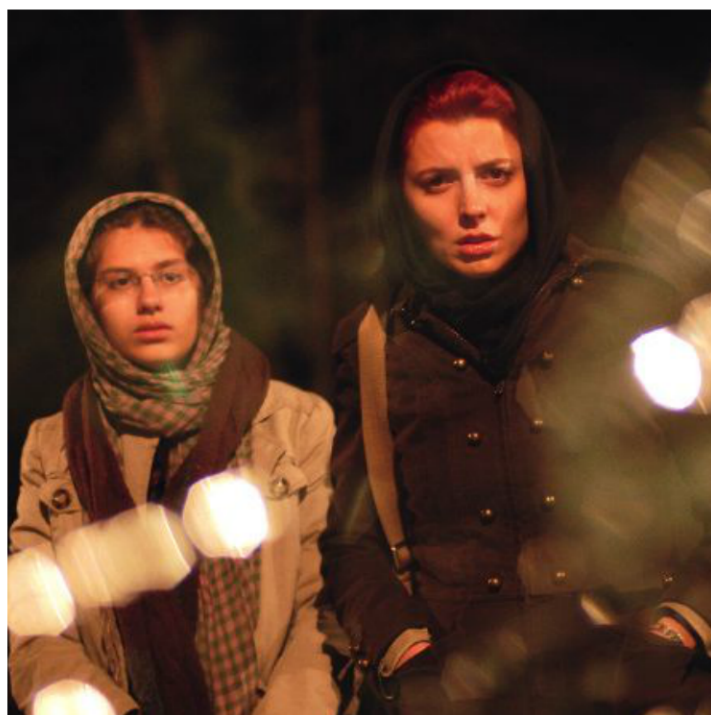
Director: Asghar Farhadi

Certificate PG 122m 48s

A Separation, Asghar Farhadi's fifth film as director, won the Golden Bear at Berlin this year – the first time for an Iranian film – and was also awarded Silver Bears for best actor and actress. Any suspicion that this might have been a proxy sympathy vote for Farhadi's absent colleague, the imprisoned filmmaker Jafar Panahi, invited as a member of the jury, is dispelled by the film itself. Fiercely intelligent, morally and emotionally complex, *A Separation* invites us into an intricate web of social, ethical and religious dilemmas, exploring interlinked questions of pride, class, honesty, guilt, family, justice, loyalty and honour, and never settles for easy answers – or indeed any answers at all. It's a film that pays us the compliment of letting us make up our own minds.

In a way, the opening scene is deceptive. It's a divorce hearing between an educated, middle-class couple, Nader and Simin. The latter wants to leave Iran – ideally with her husband and daughter, but at all events with her daughter. It's never stated precisely why she wants to leave but the implications, given that she's an intelligent, independent-minded woman, are clear enough. The scene is shot in a long unbroken take; we're placed in the position of the divorce judge, whose words we hear but whose face we never see. From this, we might expect a film of long fixed-angle takes, with little camera mobility. But once this scene is over, Farhadi's largely handheld camera roams about freely, framing and reframing tight groupings of people in confined spaces, shifting perspectives just as the balance of argument shifts between them. No one viewpoint is privileged.

This opening scene tells us that we the audience are cast as the judges. And the verdict can't be clear-cut. Nader won't leave, he says, because he must care for his father, who has Alzheimer's. It's an excuse, Simin responds; the old man is so far gone that "he doesn't even know you're his son". "But I know he's my father," Nader unanswerably retorts. The balance swings back and forth – increasingly so when the working-class couple Razieh and Hodjat enter the equation, bringing with them complications of class and religion. Nader and Simin, we can guess, aren't particularly devout, while Razieh is. When, having been employed by Nader to care for his father, she is faced with having to change the old man after he's wet himself, she phones an imam to ask if it'll be a sin; and her scrupulous piety when required to swear on the Koran brings about a crucial last-minute reversal. For Hodjat, class is the prime motivator: hypersensitive, he reacts with anger to the least hint of condescension. When the two couples face each other in court, he resents Nader's greater articulacy: "I can't talk like this guy!" he yells.



Divorce Iranian style: Sarina Farhadi, Leila Hatami

Several times the film returns to specific cruxes in the plot, such as whether Nader did or didn't know that Razieh was pregnant. But this never feels repetitive: each time Farhadi comes at the question from a slightly different angle, recalibrating its significance – especially as regards Nader and Simin's daughter Termeh, who emerges as the film's moral focus.

Towards the end of the film, an exchange of glances between Termeh and Somayeh, Razieh and Hodjat's daughter, carries an intense wealth of meaning: while their elders squabble, the two girls wordlessly acknowledge their shared distress. For a brief moment, the separation is bridged.

► **Philip Kemp**

CREDITS

Producer

Asghar Farhadi

Written by

Asghar Farhadi

Director of

Photography

Mahmood Kalani

Editor

Hayedeh Safiyari

Art Director

Keyvan Moghaddam

Sound Designer

Mohammad Reza Delpak

Costume Designer

Keyvan Moghaddam

©[tbc]

Production Company

A film by Asghar Farhadi
With the participation of
DreamLab Films

Executive Producer

Negar Eskandarfar

CAST

Leila Hatami

Simin

Peyman Moadi

Nader

Shahab Hosseini

Hodjat

Sareh Bayat

Razieh

Sarina Farhadi

Termeh

Babak Karimi

Judge

Ali-Asghar Shahbazi

Nader's father

Shirin Yazdanbakhsh

Simin's mother

Kimia Hosseini

Somayeh

Merila Zarei

Ms Ghahreini

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Artificial Eye Film
Company

11,052 ft +12 frames

Iranian theatrical title

Jodaeiye Nader az

Simin

Onscreen English

subtitle

Nader and Simin,

A Separation

SYNOPSIS Present-day Tehran. Nader and Simin, a couple in their thirties, attend a divorce hearing. Neither wants a divorce but Simin wants to move abroad and take their 10-year-old daughter Termeh with them, while Nader insists he must stay to look after his father who has Alzheimer's, and refuses to let his daughter go. They agree to divorce; Simin moves in with her parents while preparing to depart. Nader hires a young working-class woman, Razieh, to look after his father. She's pregnant and her husband Hodjat is out of work and in debt. On Razieh's first day in the job, Nader's father wets himself. She changes him but later tells Nader that she can't carry on working for him. Hodjat agrees to take over but is then arrested for debt. Razieh returns. When the father escapes from the apartment she pursues him across a busy street. Later she goes out to see a gynaecologist recommended by Termeh's tutor Ms Ghahreini. Nader comes home early to find his father tied to the bed. Furious, he pushes Razieh out of the apartment. Razieh has a miscarriage – caused, she claims, by a fall when Nader pushed her. Hodjat attacks Nader, then brings a court case against him. The judge tells Nader that if he knew Razieh was pregnant he faces jail for murder. Nader denies knowing and calls Ms Ghahreini as witness. She agrees he may have been out of earshot when she told Razieh about the gynaecologist, but changes her testimony after Hodjat verbally abuses her. Hodjat agrees to drop the case if Nader will pay compensation. Nader admits to Termeh that he knew about Razieh's pregnancy; he offers to pay the money if Razieh will swear on the Qur'an that he caused her miscarriage. Razieh admits she was hit by a car while pursuing Nader's father. The case is dropped.

Something Borrowed

USA 2011

Director: Luke Greenfield

Certificate 12A 112m 34s

"Why aren't we doing what we really want to do?" This is what unhappy lawyer Rachel (Ginnifer Goodwin), just turned 30 and therefore suddenly past what she regards as her "prime child-bearing years", asks her one-time would-be boyfriend Dex (Colin Egglesfield). Since romantic comedy is the cinematic mode of wish-fulfilment, naturally these two sleep together that very night, as they had wanted to do six years earlier; but the complications and delayed satisfactions also demanded by the genre are instantiated by Dex's imminent marriage to Rachel's long-term best friend Darcy (Kate Hudson). Cue plenty of moral dilemmas, soul-searching and lightweight angst as Rachel and Dex struggle to resolve their conflicted feelings of love, loyalty and duty with often little more than their own frustrating indecisiveness to motor the plot towards its genre-bound happy ending. As their relationship wavers between on and off with dreary repetition, the location ping-pongs between New York City and the Hamptons – with a quick stopover in London – lending the otherwise stymied story the illusion of momentum. At least it's picturesque, with Luke Greenfield (*The Girl Next Door*, *The Animal*) offering safe if undistinguished direction.

The adaptation is from Emily Giffin's 2004 novel of the same name, but there's also 'something borrowed' from *My Best Friend's Wedding* (tellingly, one of the mnemonics Rachel concocts for the principles of Tort Law is 'Don't Blame Cameron Diaz'), and something else from *27 Dresses*, while the scene in which Rachel draws on her own heartfelt sentiments to compose Darcy's wedding vows is straight out of *Cyrano de Bergerac* – albeit with less wit. The one apparent breach of generic convention, the heterosexuality of Rachel's male confidant Ethan (John Krasinski), is purely cosmetic – as is demonstrated by his spending half the film *pretending*

SYNOPSIS At her 30th birthday party, lawyer Rachel reveals to her friend Dex that six years ago she had a crush on him; they sleep together – despite the fact that Dex is due to marry Rachel's self-absorbed best friend Darcy. Oblivious to the affair, Darcy tries to set Rachel up with lothario Marcus, while Rachel's long-term confidant Ethan desperately avoids the advances of needy Claire. As the wedding approaches, Rachel and Dex struggle to reconcile their rekindled feelings for one another with their sense of loyalty and guilt. They conceal their on-off entanglement from everyone except Ethan, who is about to move to London.

Darcy confides in Rachel that she has cheated on Dex, who has recently stopped having sex with her. Conflicted, Rachel tells Darcy that she should still marry Dex – much to Ethan's frustration. When Rachel eventually declares to Dex that she wants to live with him, he tells her that he can't. Crestfallen, Rachel visits Ethan in London. Ethan reveals his own love for Rachel, and his belief that she still loves Dex. Rachel returns to New York and discovers that Dex has called off the wedding to be with her. Dex hides when Darcy arrives to express her relief that the marriage is off, now that she is pregnant by Marcus. Seeing Dex, Darcy turns her back on Rachel – but two months later the friends make up. In a coda, a horrified Ethan is ambushed in London by Darcy, suitcases in tow.



My best friend's wedding: Kate Hudson

to be gay. Similarly in the opening scene Rachel must 'act surprised' at the party she has already predicted Darcy is throwing for her – an apt introduction to a film in which there are no real surprises. This extends to the necessary demonisation of Darcy, in part for the very infidelity, deceit and self-absorption that Rachel in fact also displays, so that we are somehow better able to sympathise when she gets her man in the end. A post-credits coda threatens a sequel that would feature yet more of the insufferable Darcy's shallow idiocy – proving that you can't always get what you want.

♦ Anton Bitel

CREDITS

Produced by
Hilary Swank
Molly Micker-Smith
Broderick Johnson
Andrew A. Kosove
Aaron Lubin
Pamela Schein Murphy
Screenplay
Jennie Snyder Urman
Based on the novel by
Emily Giffin
Director of Photography
Charles Minsky
Film Editor
John Axelrad
Production Designer
Jane Musky
Music by/Score Conducted by
Alex Wurman
Sound Mixer
Tod A. Maitland
Costume Designer
Gary Jones

CAST

Ginnifer Goodwin
Rachel
Kate Hudson
Darcy
Colin Egglesfield
Dex
John Krasinski
Ethan
Steve Howey
Marcus
Ashley Williams
Claire
Geoff Pierson
Dexter Thaler Sr
Jill Eikenberry
Bridget Thaler
Jonathan Epstein
Professor Zigman

Leia Thompson
bridal consultant
Sarah Baldwin
June

©Alcon Film Fund, LLC
Production Companies
Alcon Entertainment
presents a 2S Films
production
A Wild Oceans Films
production
A Luke Greenfield film
Executive Producer
Ellen H. Schwartz

Dolby Digital/DTS/ SDDS
Colour/Prints by
Technicolor

Distributor
Entertainment Film
Distributors Ltd

10,130 ft +12 frames

Stake Land

USA 2010

Director: Jim Mickle

Certificate 15 98m 22s

In creating *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), patient zero of zombie apocalypse cinema, George Romero drew on Richard Matheson's 1953 novel *I Am Legend*, in which the world is overrun by scientifically rationalised vampires. Many traits Romero grafted on to his zombies, notably a need for human food, come from Matheson's vampires rather than earlier, voodoo-inflected zombies. Thus, as David Pirie argued in *The Vampire Cinema*, the zombie epidemic/apocalypse genre is essentially a sub-category of vampire movie.

Nevertheless, while zombie apocalypses are tiresomely commonplace, vampire apocalypses have been thin on the ground. Three official adaptations of *I Am Legend* get further and further from the point (the proliferation of monsters who have always been real but were written off as myths) by making the menace less and less like vampires. Only a few 'altered society' efforts (*Perfect Creature*, *Daybreakers*) envision large-scale vampire populations, and they shy away from Matheson's vision of feral vamps besieging dwindling bands of normals – though Justin Cronin's set-for-filming novel *The Passage* is an epic restatement of the theme.

This lack gives Jim Mickle's *Stake Land* a certain edge in a crowded genre of fall-of-civilisation films, though in practice his 'vamps' act much like recent movie zombies, albeit with fangs and an allergy to sunlight – and with the heart-stab (or spine-severing) replacing the head-shot as a method of disposal. Mickle's 2006 film *Mulberry Street* (more bluntly entitled *Zombie Virus on Mulberry Street* for DVD, and also made in collaboration with writer/star Nick Damici) similarly spun zombies by making them Nosferatu-look rat people. Here we get a plague of vampires, and mutterings from Damici's man-with-no-name Van Helsing figure which suggest he knew about them before they became so common, but no attempt to match Matheson's reading of vampirism as a blood disease. Indeed, the only person who claims to know where vampires come from is the lunatic Christian goon-cum-Dracula wannabe who alleges that they are God's way of punishing sinners, and who pioneers the technique of destroying settlements by dropping captured vamps on them from helicopters.

Influenced by post-apocalypse on-the-road books and films such as *Damnation Alley*, *Mad Max 2* and *The Road*, *Stake Land* – whose plot parallels to *Zombieland* (2009) are presumably coincidental – focuses on the bond between the orphaned narrator and his harsh but caring substitute father as a small band of similarly uncalled souls (including Kelly McGillis as a middle-aged nun/rape victim and Danielle



A stake in the future: Connor Paolo

Harris as a pregnant folk singer) are drawn to their quest for a New Eden. Mickie seems to take a despairing route, killing off characters who might traditionally signify hope, but he stages an affecting meet-cute in a coda which brings on a crossbow-competent girl who has been seeing off her former classmates and who shyly confesses

to Martin (unnamed until then) that she hasn't seen a boy in a long time. The last scene has the survivors crossing into Canada but it's still ambiguous: earlier on, a cynic suggests that although New Eden is too wintry a clime for reptile-blooded vampires, there's no food – so you have to worry about cannibals. **Kim Newman**

CREDITS

Producers
Larry Fessenden
Peter Phok
Brent Kunkle
Adam Folk
Derek Cure
Written by
Nick Damici
Jim Mickle
Director of Photography
Ryan Samul
Edit
Jim Mickle
Production Designer
Daniel R. Kersting
Original Score
Jeff Grace
Sound Design
Graham Reznick

Costume Designer
Elisabeth Vastola
Visual Effects
Jim Mickle

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Production Companies
Dark Sky Films presents
a Glass Eye Pix
production in
association with
OffHollywood Pictures
and Belladonna
Productions
Executive Producers
Malik B. Ali
Badie Ali
Hamza Ali
Greg Newman

CAST

Nick Damici
Mister
Connor Paolo
Martin
Michael Cerveris
Jebediah Loven
Sean Nelson
Willie
Kelly McGillis
sister
Danielle Harris
Belle
Bonnie Dennison
Peggy
Chance Kelly
Officer Harley
Tim House
sheriff
Larry Fessenden
roadhouse bartender

Adam Scarimbolo
Kevin

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Metrodome Distribution
Ltd

8,853 ft +0 frames

Take Me Home Tonight

Director: Michael Dowse
Certificate 15 97m 54s

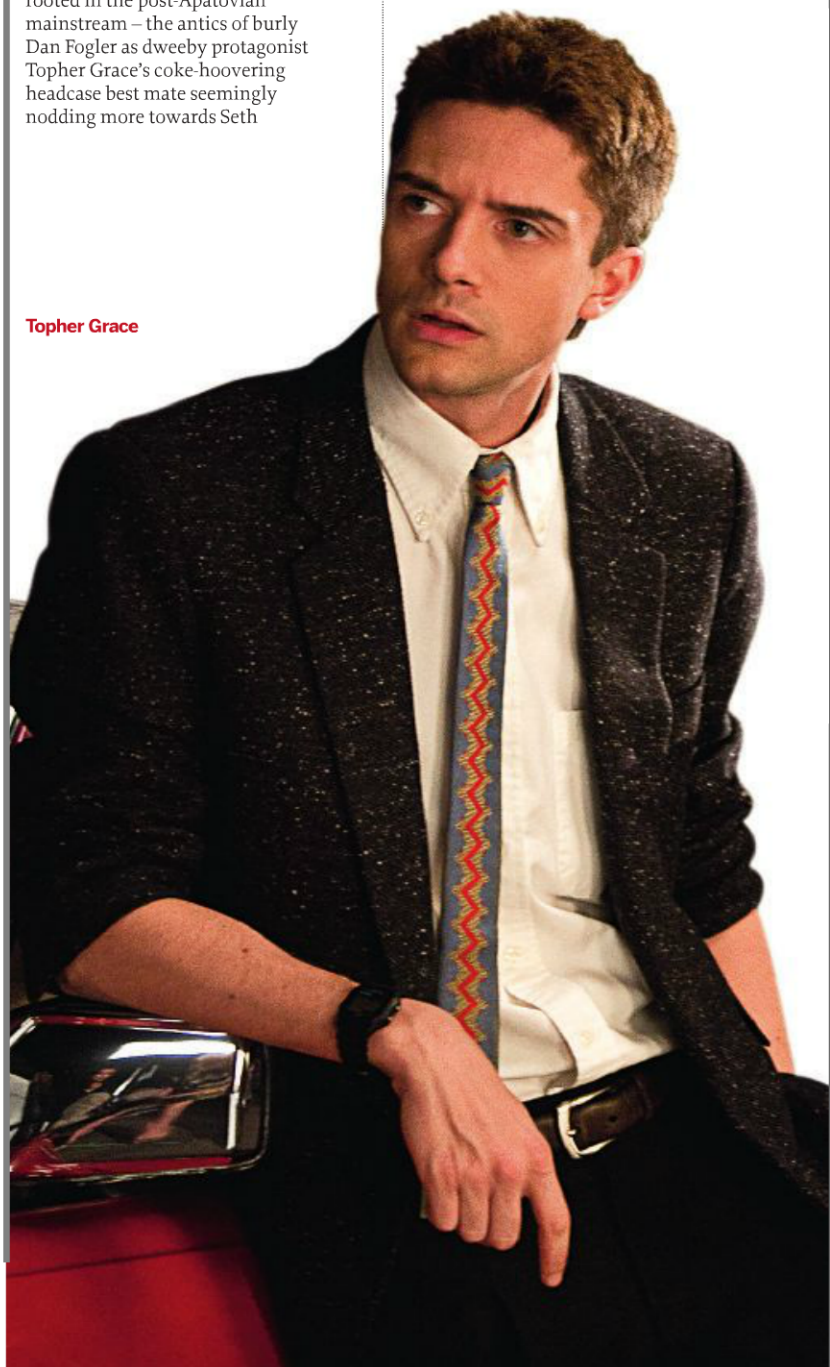
What is it with 1980s revival comedy? Understandable when *Adventureland* (2009) uses the period as shorthand for a landscape of youthful ennui, or when the plot of *Hot Tub Time Machine* (2010) sends the protagonists back in time to see their younger days for what they really were, but in this case... does the sight of vinyl records, back-combed big hair and the Buggles on the soundtrack really make the film funnier? Hard to answer with an enthusiastic affirmative, though perhaps it's an attempt to give Michael Dowse's movie some distinctiveness, since its combination of rites-of-passage and raucous hi-jinks would otherwise seem rooted in the post-Apatovian mainstream – the antics of burly Dan Fogler as dweeby protagonist Topher Grace's coke-hoovering headcase best mate seemingly nodding more towards Seth

Rogenesque pluck than the unrestrained excesses of long-departed John Belushi.

That said, one might argue that Grace's dilemma over exploiting his MIT-grad number-crunching skills to succeed in high finance is specifically tied to the years of Gordon Gekko and Reaganomics, but this notion seems tenuous at best, leaving us with such 80s signifiers as the *Risky Business* Ray-Bans assisting Grace's party-entrance moment of supreme cool, and a Michael Biehn cameo (as the lad's disapproving LAPD officer dad) providing mere decoration on an overfamiliar catalogue of post-adolescent awkwardness, doomed misbehaviour and formulaic romantic yearning.

While leading man Grace is co-credited with the original story (the screenplay is by Jackie and Jeff Filgo, from TV's *That '70s Show*), his skills in light comedy aren't especially well served by the

Topher Grace



SYNOPSIS The near future. Feral, mindless vampires have proliferated, leading to the collapse of governments and a greatly reduced human population. In the US, teenager Martin is rescued by a vampire hunter known as the Mister from an attack in which the rest of Martin's family is killed. The Mister takes Martin on as his apprentice, and they wander between isolated, embattled communities of survivors, destroying vampires. The pair rescue a nun from rapists who are members of the Brotherhood, a cult run by Jebediah Loven, who professes to believe that the vampires are doing God's work in wiping out civilisation. Having killed the rapists, one of whom was Loven's son, the trio are captured by the Brotherhood and condemned, but escape. The Mister cuts Loven and tethers him, leaving him to be killed by the vampires.

Picking up other nomadic survivors – pregnant young woman Belle, ex-Marine Willie – the group head north for the supposedly vampire-free New Eden, but vampires and the Brotherhood continue to hound them. The nun commits suicide rather than be taken by vampires. In the mountains, the group are attacked by a new breed of vampire, one capable of speech and rational thought. Loven, turned vampire, kills Willie and abducts Belle, luring the Mister and Martin into a trap. The hunters defeat and destroy Loven, and Martin stakes Belle rather than let her turn.

Further on, the hunters encounter Peggy, a young girl with survivor skills. Together, they enter New Eden – formerly Canada.

broadness of the material, though he does pull off a rather deft moment of triumph, convincing all and sundry at an upscale bankers' party that he is indeed a currency exchange guru for Goldman Sachs. The movie's key romantic thrust, however, is anodyne indeed, since neither the script nor Teresa Palmer's blank performance can make the object of his affection – the blonde-bombshell high-school prom queen turned financial services intern – characterful enough to warrant the fuss he makes over her. It's up to an underused Anna Faris (Grace's creative but under-confident sibling heading towards unsuitable marriage to her boorish but economically viable boyfriend) to bolster the story's seemingly sincere call for self-determination in a sea of social conformity. Any aspersions to seriousness disintegrate, though, in an arbitrary finale involving a perilous downhill descent inside a large steel ball – which fails to convince as the resolution to anyone's problems. In the event, hearing Opus's terrifyingly awful Euro-pop anthem 'Live Is Life' may prompt shivers of nostalgic recognition in some viewers, but the movie itself is hardly coherent enough to follow suit.

► **Trevor Johnston**

Credits for this film were unavailable at the time of going to press and will be published in a future issue.

SYNOPSIS Los Angeles, circa 1988. Recent MIT graduate Matt Franklin works in a video store while pondering his future. When his unrequited high-school crush Tori Frederking wanders in, he poses as a Goldman Sachs executive and agrees to meet her later at a party hosted by his sister Wendy's wealthy boyfriend Kyle Masterson. He drives there with his friend Barry Nathan in a red Mercedes convertible Barry has stolen from the car dealer who just fired him. The latter also dips into a stash of cocaine in the glove compartment – which leads to his uncontrolled behaviour at the party; Matt, however, makes a favourable impression on Tori. Matt, Tori and Barry move on to a soiree hosted by her banker boss, where Matt convinces her he's a financial whiz kid. They bond via a shared disdain for mercenary ambition and make love – but she storms off after he admits he's a lowly shop assistant.

Barry and Matt crash the Mercedes while attempting to snort the rest of the coke, but are luckily let go by Matt's LAPD officer father, who voices his disappointment at his son's lack of initiative. The two men return to the first party, where Wendy has called off her wedding to the boorish Kyle, and Barry hooks up with a goth girl. After a speech of defiant individualism, Matt takes a death-defying ride inside the host's large metal sphere. He almost drowns in a swimming pool but is subsequently reunited with a conciliatory Tori.

Thor

USA 2011

Director: Kenneth Branagh

Certificate 12A 114m Os

Well before the Marvel boom of the 1960s, it had been suggested that comic-book superheroes were the 20th-century equivalents of sons of Gods of legend. Superman, the first superhero, owes much to Hercules, Thor or even Jesus (a connection that comics, whose creators were overwhelmingly if nervously Jewish, were careful not to make).

In 1962, during a creative burst that yielded the cornerstone characters of the Marvel universe, writer-editor Stan Lee (and his writer brother Larry Lieber) and Jack Kirby went back to the wellspring and blended Asgardian saga with science fiction in 'The Stone Men from Saturn', in which a seemingly ordinary mortal is imbued with the power (and costume) of thunder god Thor when he picks up a stick that turns into a hammer. In the early days Thor spent as much time smashing communists as dealing with his evil brother Loki, but the stories came to dwell more and more on cosmic concerns, and the character has stuck around ever since (Eric Allan Kramer played him in the 1988 TV movie *The Incredible Hulk Returns*). Now, with Kenneth Branagh's new film, the son of Odin joins Marvel's ongoing movie franchise, complete with plot threads picked up from the *Iron Man* pictures and trailing into the forthcoming *Captain America* and *The Avengers*.

When covert agency SHIELD tries to assess the energy signature of Thor's magic hammer, it's clear that the disconnect between the worlds of Asgard (a blend of Richard Donner's *Krypton* and Richard Wagner's *Ring Cycle*) and New Mexico, where much of the film's action takes place, will be blithely ignored. There's minor bleating that perhaps the Asgardians are aliens once taken for gods, and Natalie Portman's heroine (a spunky scientist rather than a weedy nurse) quotes Arthur C. Clarke's saw about advanced technology being indistinguishable from magic, but Branagh lets pieces fall where they may. The pack-rat borrowings of Marvel are exposed when Thor's comrades are described as "Xena, Jackie Chan and Robin Hood" – though it might be a sop to the less educated that the character most obviously borrowed from another source isn't likened to his model, Falstaff.

Chris Hemsworth makes an imposing, good-humoured Thor, learning humility when tased by a grad student or smashing his coffee cup to call for a refill, but the motor of the film is Tom Hiddleston's complex, conflicted Loki (Branagh, remember, had a career highlight as Iago). Loki is a triple-crosser, betraying his foster father Odin to his real father Laufey so that he can murder the latter in a misguided attempt to please the former.

Thor has the mandatory daddy issues but is a rare modern superhero with a father (Anthony Hopkins, one eye



Like father like son: Chris Hemsworth, Anthony Hopkins

twinkling) and a refreshing freedom from angst. This forges Thor's place in his own franchise and is genial and exciting enough to make up for superfluous 3D, clunky thigh-slapping Asgardian speechifying and a slight lack of full-on hammer action in the Midgard sections. ► **Kim Newman**

CREDITS

Produced by

Kevin Feige

Screenplay

Ashley Edward Miller

Zack Stentz

Don Payne

Story

J. Michael Straczynski

Mark Protosevich

Based on the Marvel comic book by Stan Lee, Larry Lieber, Jack Kirby

Director of Photography

Harris Zambiaroukos

Editor

Paul Rubell

Production Designer

Bo Welch

Music

Patrick Doyle

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Production Companies

Paramount Pictures and Marvel Entertainment

present a Marvel Studios production

A film by Kenneth Branagh

Executive Producers

Patricia Whitcher

Louis D'Esposito

Alan Fine

Stan Lee

David Maisel

Visual Effects

But

Special Visual Effects and Digital Animation

Digital Domain

Visual Effects

Fuel VFX

Luma Pictures

Whiskeytree Inc.

Evil Eye Pictures

Costume Designer

Alexandra Byrne

Sound Designer

Richard King

Stunt Co-ordinators

Andy Armstrong

Supervising: Vic Armstrong

CAST

Chris Hemsworth

Thor

Natalie Portman

Jane Foster

Tom Hiddleston

Loki

Stellan Skarsgård

Erik Selvig

Kat Dennings

Darcy Lewis

Clark Gregg

Agent Coulson

Colm Feore

King Laufey

Ray Stevenson

Volstagg

Idris Elba

Heimdall

Jaimie Alexander

Sir

Tadanobu Asano

Hogun

Joshua Dallas

Fandral

Rene Russo

Frigga

Anthony Hopkins

Odin

Dolby Digital/DTS/

SDSS

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Some screenings

presented in 3D

Distributor

Paramount Pictures UK

10,260 ft +0 frames

SYNOPSIS Asgard, realm of the Norse gods. Thor, son of Odin, impulsively leads a raiding party – which includes his brother Loki – into Jotunheim, land of the Frost Giants, breaking a truce that has held for years. Decreeing that Thor be stripped of his powers and banished to Earth, Odin casts a spell on Mjolnir, Thor's hammer: only if his son learns humility will its powers be restored to him. Loki learns that he is the natural son of Laufey, king of the Frost Giants, found abandoned as a baby by Odin.

In New Mexico, Thor meets Jane Foster, a scientist investigating weather anomalies, and is taken for a crazy homeless person when he talks about Asgard. Odin throws Mjolnir at Earth; SHIELD, a US covert agency, establishes a base to study the hammer, which no mortal can lift. Thor breaks into the base in an attempt to reclaim the hammer.

Odin falls into a sleep-like coma, and Loki takes the throne, incapacitating Heimdall, guardian of the rainbow bridge between the realms, and conspiring with Laufey to enable the Frost Giants to invade Asgard. Loki also sends the Destroyer, an armoured killing machine, to Earth to finish off Thor. Thor's friends go to Earth to stand with him in battle. Thor's willingness to sacrifice himself for Jane and other innocents makes Mjolnir fly to his hand. Thor smites the Destroyer and returns to Asgard, where he discovers that Loki has murdered Laufey and is about to commit genocide against the Frost Giants. Thor and Loki fight, and Odin revives. To save Jotunheim, Thor smashes the rainbow bridge. Loki falls into the void.

Jane's colleague Professor Selvig meets with SHIELD head Nick Fury to examine a source of immense power. It seems that Selvig is possessed by Loki.



The risk factor: Guy Martin

TT3D Closer to the Edge

United Kingdom 2011
Director: Richard De Aragues
Certificate 15 103m 34s

TT3D, Richard De Aragues's feature documentary about the Isle of Man TT races, is caught between two opposing styles of storytelling. On one hand, this is a very conventional affair, celebrating one of the oldest and most hair-raising bike races in the world. It's full of tourist-board imagery of Manx landscapes and skies – there is even footage and music from George Formby, whose 1935 film *No Limit* was set against the backdrop of the TT races. But *TT3D* also probes away at a far darker and more unsettling story, in which death is a commonplace occurrence.

In its stronger and more idiosyncratic moments, the film transcends the sports-doc conventions that it elsewhere so readily embraces. The imagery of drivers leaning into corners, which they take at up to 170mph, sparks memories of the equally eerie footage of

the reckless ski jumper Walter Steiner in Werner Herzog's *The Great Ecstasy of Woodcarver Steiner* (1975). These drivers freely admit in interviews that much of the buzz of the event is related to the enormous risks it presents.

De Aragues shot the film with two full 3D units, each using twin red cameras on special rigs, and he also incorporates footage from the 27 high-definition cameras used for TV coverage. With all this hardware at his disposal, he's certainly able to convey the speed at which the riders roar down the Isle of Man's leafy roads. There is, however, something disconcerting about the way the 3D is used. In the race sequences it offers extra depth and a more immersive experience, but in interviews it risks seeming a distraction. The narration by Jared Leto is effective enough in setting the scene, yet it lacks the awestruck intensity that Herzog brings to his voiceovers.

The way the film profiles the leading competitors is strictly conventional, sketching the stories of several riders but homing in especially on Guy Martin, an eccentric and opinionated driver who's expected to win at least one of the races. The point at which the film changes direction and becomes stranger and far more provocative is

following the death of New Zealand rider Paul Dobbs, whose widow Bridget – for all her grief – expresses no regrets about the manner in which he died, talking instead in terms of seizing the moment and getting the most out of life. Her remarks are echoed by all Dobbs's rivals, who are likewise ready to accept the risk for the exhilaration they experience while racing.

At most other sports events, the strong chance that competitors will die or be badly injured simply wouldn't be tolerated. At the TT races, somebody may have had a terrible accident in the morning but – as one racer bluntly observes – that doesn't mean riders will drive any less fast in the afternoon. (The film includes grimly spectacular footage, shot from the air, of Conor Cummins's bike skidding off the road and over a small precipice.) It's the defiance and recklessness that make the race and its subjects so fascinating – and so grim. What Martin makes very clear is that when he is riding, he is utterly free. That, more than winning, is what draws him and others back to the event again and again. **Geoffrey Macnab**

CREDITS

Producers
Steve Christian
Marc Samuelson
Director of Photography
Thomas Kuerzl
Editor
Beverley Mills
Music Composed by
Andy Gray
Production Sound Mixer
Colin Nicolson
3D Conversions and Visual Effects
Dimension Ltd.

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Productions Four
Limited
Production Companies
CinemaNX and Isle of Man Film present

Filmed in association with North One Television

WITH

Jared Leto
narrator

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
3D

Distributor
CinemaNX

9,321 ft +0 frames

Upside Down The Creation Records Story

United Kingdom 2010
Director: Danny O'Connor
Certificate 15 100m 52s

Paraphrasing Woodrow Wilson on D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, Alan McGee's final soundbite in this documentary about his esteemed record label Creation is a claim to have rewritten "pop history with lightning". Though the final stretches of Danny O'Connor's film detail McGee's eventual meltdown – when, flushed with the breakthrough success of label bands Primal Scream and Oasis, his body coursing with chemicals, he deluded himself (by his own admission) that he was a world-cultural figure of the significance of Shakespeare or Beethoven – here is one piece of self-mythology that music fans of a particular leaning might allow.

From a distance, there seems little to differentiate the blinding white flashes produced by McGee's Creation Records from roughly contemporaneous electrical storms going on over the Madchester of Tony Wilson's Factory Records, the scene dramatised in Michael Winterbottom's *24 Hour Party People* (2002). Factory got going a little earlier but both labels (arguably) reached the height of their respective bell curves during the acid house movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s, energised by the arrival of ecstasy and seizing the instant to fuse indie rock with the burgeoning dance-music culture. With their single 'Loaded' and its accompanying album *Screamadelica* (1991), Primal Scream – as New Order and the Happy Mondays had done over on Factory – brought rave culture into the charts and into Britain's living rooms.

More uniquely, Creation also gave studio space to Kevin Shields, whose band My Bloody Valentine's second record 'Loveless' reacted to the moment not by incorporating the rhythms of the dancefloor but by co-opting its euphoria, its sense of melting bliss, and transmuting it into gorgeous, amniotic white noise. This was a distillation, and perfection, of a noise-pop guitar sound that had originated with Creation and its early protégés the Jesus and Mary Chain, a band McGee had brought to London with him from his Scottish hometown, East Kilbride. Finding unexpected common ground between the abrasive chug of the Velvet Underground and the Wall of Sound of Phil Spector's girl-group pop, the Mary Chain adumbrated the shoegaze sound that best typifies the output of the Creation stable and reached its zenith with 'Loveless'. Neil Hannon of chamber-pop band the Divine Comedy turns up in O'Connor's film to call My Bloody Valentine's record, with a touch of the McGee hyperbole, "the Sistine Chapel of modern rock music", while Bobby Gillespie – drummer for the Mary Chain, then lead singer for Primal

SYNOPSIS A documentary about the Isle of Man TT (Tourist Trophy) motorbike race. The race takes place each year on public roads, with drivers reaching speeds of almost 200mph. Over the years, more than 200 people have been killed during the event, but the drivers accept the risk.

The filmmakers profile leading competitors in the 2010 race, focusing especially on Guy Martin, an opinionated maverick who has long been tipped to win. Martin starts well but doesn't win any of the first main events. New Zealand driver Paul Dobbs is killed during one of the races. Dobbs's widow reflects on his death; despite her grief, she doesn't question his decision to participate in the race.

Ian Hutchinson wins the first four solo races. Martin goes all out to beat him in the prestigious fifth race, but has a dreadful accident which he's lucky to survive. The race is stopped and then re-run. Local rider Conor Cummins veers off the road. Hutchinson wins; Martin and Cummins are left nursing severe injuries in hospital but are determined to race again.

Not long after the Isle of Man TT, Hutchinson sustains a terrible injury in another race. Like Martin and Cummins, he vows to return to the sport.



Creation myth: Danny O'Connor, Alan McGee

← Scream – suggests, with some humility, that rock music has been on a downward slide ever since.

Creation's greatest popular coup was yet to come, however, and O'Connor leaves plenty of screentime to chart the arrival of Oasis, the Manchester phenomenon whose success would bring McGee hitherto unimagined wealth. Tighter control from parent company Sony, which bought Creation in the early 1990s, led also to a weakening of the identity of McGee's label, which McGee seems to have had the self-possession to recognise, some time after the Gallagher brothers' epochal Knebworth Park concert in 1996. He called it quits in late 1999, symbolically dovetailing the label's demise with the obsequies for the passing millennium.

The Britpop era has been television documentary fodder for so long now that this final stretch of *Upside Down* feels like a perfunctory joining of dots – Oasis's chart war with Blur, the visit to 10 Downing Street, the champagne excess. Though he's not known for his eloquence, Liam Gallagher's absence from the talking heads nonetheless keeps O'Connor's gloss on these storied years from looking anything like definitive. This visually conventional

SYNOPSIS A documentary about the London-based record label Creation, formed by Glaswegian Alan McGee in the early 1980s. Comprising archive footage of the label's bands and interviews with McGee, band members, journalists and employees, the film traces Creation's evolution from its underground roots with shoegaze bands such as the Jesus and Mary Chain, My Bloody Valentine and Ride, through the acid house era (detailing the success of Primal Scream) and Britpop years (with the mainstream breakthrough of Oasis), to McGee's calling time on the label in 1999.

but engrossing film is more worthwhile for its mapping of the earlier creative breakthroughs, and above all for its portrait of the fascinatingly surefooted figure steering Creation through its gradual metamorphosis.

◆ Samuel Wigley

CREDITS

Produced by
Danny O'Connor
Editor
Jonny Halifax
Original Soundtrack Music
Mark Gardener
Lighting Camera
Daryl Chase
Sound Recordist
Chris Proctor

©Document Films
Production Company
Document Films
present

Executive Producer
Mark Cranwell
Soundtrack

"Upside Down"; "Some Candy Talking"; "I Love Rock & Roll" – The Jesus and Mary Chain; "Flowers in the Sky" – Revolving Paint Dream; "Participate" – The Laughing Apple; "What's Happening" – Jasmine Minks; "There Must Be a Better Life" – Biff Bang Pow!; "Part Time Punks" – The Television Personalities; "She's So Out of Touch" – Slaughter Joe; "Up the Hill and Down the Slope" – The Loft; "Imperial"; "Loaded"; "Higher Than the Sun"; "Swastika Eyes" – Primal Scream; "Destroy the Heart" – The House of Love; "You Made Me Realise"; "To Here Knows When"; "Soon" – My Bloody Valentine; "Taste"; "Leave Them All Behind" – Ride; "The Concept" – Teenage Fanclub; "Duel" – Swervedriver; "Celeste" – The Telescopes; "If I Can't Change Your Mind" – Sugar; "Rock n' Roll Star"; "Wendervall";

"Champagne Supernova" – Oasis; "Serious Drugs" – BMX Bandits; "Wake Up Boo!" – The Boo Radleys; "Something for the Weekend" – Super Furry Animals; "The Mill Hill Self Hate Club" – Edward Ball

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Revolver Entertainment

9,078 ft +0 frames

Yu-Gi-Oh! 3D Bonds beyond Time

Japan 2010

Director: Takeshita Kenichi

Certificate PG 60m 40s

The *Yu-Gi-Oh!* franchise began in 1996 as a Japanese manga series by Takahashi Kazuki, subsequently extended across various media, including television, the cinema and games of both the computer and traditional card-plus-dice variety. Its substantial global fanbase may explain why the big-screen spin-offs make no attempt at converting *Yu-Gi-Oh!* virgins – a tactic already noted by Andrew Osmond in his review of *Yu-Gi-Oh! The Movie: Pyramid of Light* (*S&S* October 2004).

At just over half its predecessor's running time, *Yu-Gi-Oh! 3D: Bonds Beyond Time* adopts an even more condensed, quasi-semiotic approach to its material. Its 11-minute, notionally scene-setting prologue comprises short snippets from the TV series, acclimatising existing fans to a complex narrative structure involving multiple time periods and much

fiddling with the past in order to influence (or annul) future outcomes.

The bulk of the film comprises a succession of duels between youthful heroes Jaden, Yugi and Yusei (assembled from different eras to act as a team) and the evil Paradox. Despite much hi-tech sound and fury (augmented here by CGI 3D effects), the 'action' consists of the jarringly old-fashioned playing of Top Trumps-style 'Duel Monsters' cards, unveiling such creatures and phenomena as the Stardust Dragon, the Malefic Rainbow Dragon, the Magic Gate of Miracles and the Dark Spiral Force. The resulting scores appear on screen, making the experience akin to the tedium of watching someone else playing an elaborate computer game without bothering to explain the rules beforehand.

For non-initiates, there are some mildly diverting moments (when Paradox invokes the Malefic World spell, solid buildings turn transparent, revealing swirling purple galaxies behind them), but those in search of the Proustian/Renaissance experience that the makers presumably intended have a daunting amount of homework ahead of them. However, it's safe to say that the film's target audience knows exactly what it's in for.

◆ Michael Brooke

CREDITS

Screenplay
Yoshida Shin
Director of Photography
Edamitsu Hiroaki
Art Director
Higashi Junichi
Chief Animation Director
Kagami Takahiro
Storyboard
Takeshita Kenichi
Sound Director
Hiramitsu Takuya

©NAS, TV Tokyo
Production Companies
NAS, TV Tokyo

VOICE CAST

English language version
Dan Green
Yugi Muto
Frank Frankson
Yusei Fudo
Matthew Charles
Jaden Yuki
Sean Schemmel
Paradox

Ted Lewis
Jack Atlas
Production Companies
Tom Wayland
Crow Hogan
Bella Hudson
Akiza Izinski/dark magician girl
Darren Dunstan
Maximillion Pegasus
Eileen Stevens
Luca/Luna/Yubel
Wayne Grayson
Lyman Banner/Solomon Muto

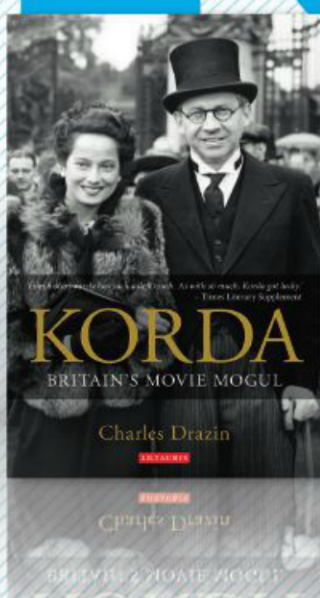
In Colour
3D
Distributor
Manga Entertainment
5,460 ft +0 frames
Japanese theatrical title
Gekijō-Ban Yu-Gi-Oh! - Cho-Yugo! Jikū o Koeta Kizuna



'Yu-Gi-Oh! 3D: Bonds Beyond Time'

SYNOPSIS New Domino City, the present. Duel Monsters champion Yusei Fudo is challenged to a contest by the mysterious Paradox, who then vanishes with Yusei's valuable Stardust Dragon card. A series of inexplicable events befall the city, both in historical records as well as in the present, leading Yusei to realise that Paradox has mastered time travel and is using Stardust Dragon to alter the past. The Crimson Dragon gives Yusei the ability to travel through time, and several years earlier he finds fellow Duel Monsters champion Jaden Yuki being attacked by Paradox and the Stardust Dragon, and rescues him. Jaden and Yusei then travel back a few years further, just before Maximillion Pegasus's Domino City duel tournament, and rescue Yugi Muto from the Malefic monsters that Paradox has unleashed. The trio realise that Paradox is attempting to prevent Duel Monsters from ever having existed, and they challenge him to a three-to-one duel. Paradox initially gains the upper hand, his travels having enabled him to build a formidable Duel Monsters arsenal, but the three friends' complementary duelling skills eventually prevail. Yusei and Jaden return to their own time – in Yusei's case to a reassuringly familiar New Domino City.

Read

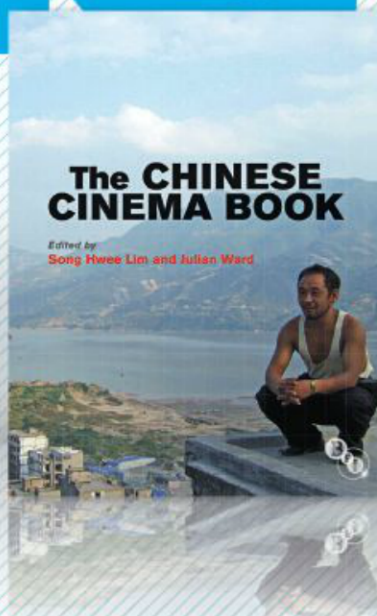


Korda: Britain's Movie Mogul

By Charles Drazin, I.B. Tauris, 424pp, paperback, £15.99, ISBN 9781848856950

This biography traces Alexander Korda's path from his rural childhood in a remote part of Hungary to a British knighthood. Korda's legacy, it argues, was a film industry that dared to dream on the largest possible scale. But he also exemplified the pattern of boom and bust that has dogged British cinema ever since he first came into the limelight in 1933 with the international success of *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. To understand his often turbulent career is to gain a profound insight into the nature of British cinema both then and now.

www.ibtauris.com

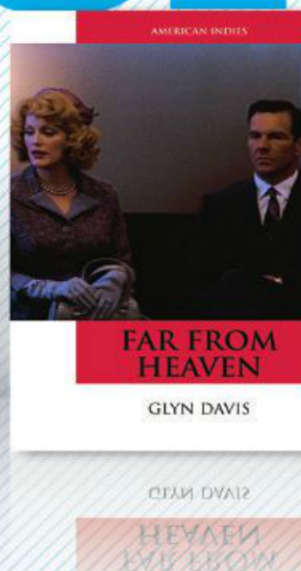


The Chinese Cinema Book

Edited by Song Hwee Lim and Julian Ward, BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 232pp, illustrated, paperback, £18.99, ISBN 9781844573448

This richly illustrated book is the definitive guide to the cinemas of China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Chinese diaspora. It explores major film movements such as the Shanghai cinema of the 1930s, the Fifth Generation filmmakers and the Hong Kong new wave, as well as key issues and auteurs, from early cinema to the present day.

www.palgrave.com

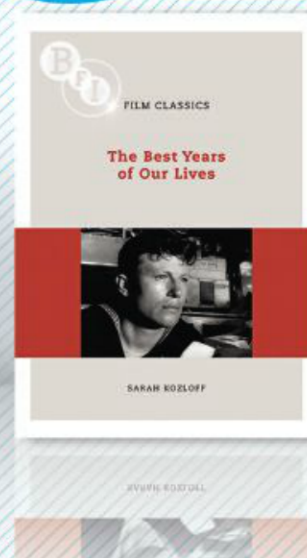


Far from Heaven

By Glyn Davis, Edinburgh University Press, 168pp, illustrated, paperback, £14.99, ISBN 9780748637799

Nominated for four Oscars, *Far from Heaven* earned rave reviews and won widespread cultural and critical recognition. This book in the American Indies series is the perfect complement to studying the film, as Glyn Davies places it within the canon of American independent cinema and the New Queer Cinema movement, discussing themes such as authorship, melodrama and queer theory. The American Indies series focuses on contemporary American films that have found commercial success but have not been constrained by the formal and ideological parameters of mainstream Hollywood cinema.

www.euppublishing.com



The Best Years of Our Lives

By Sarah Kozloff, BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 112pp, illustrated, paperback, £9.99, ISBN 9781844573264

From BFI Film Classics comes this study of William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), one of the most important films in American film history. Sarah Kozloff explores how, in telling the story of three servicemen struggling to adapt to civilian life on their return home from World War II, Wyler created a 'social problem' film depicting class divisions and the psychological effects of war. She draws on original research, including Wyler's personal papers and Samuel Goldwyn's files.

www.palgrave.com

Curiouser and curiouser

Jan Svankmajer turns Lewis Carroll's *Wonderland* into his own violent, unsettling universe, writes **Kim Newman**

Alice (Neco z Alenky)

Jan Svankmajer; Czechoslovakia 1988; BFI/Dual Format DVD and Blu-Ray; Region 0/ABC; Certificate PG; 86 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: original Czech and alternative English-language audio, 'Alice in Wonderland' (1903), 'Elsie and the Brown Bunny' (1921), 'Alice in Label Land' (1974), 'Stille Nacht II: Are We Still Married?' (1992), 'Stille Nacht IV: Can't Go Wrong Without You' (1993), illustrated booklet with essays, film notes, biographies and credits

Here's a silly but instructive game. Set out to watch a random selection of films made in the past quarter of a century but eject the disc whenever a reference to 'Alice in Wonderland' – or, by association, 'Alice' derivatives 'Peter Pan' and 'The Wizard of Oz' – crops up. It's quite likely that you could then get through a whole weekend without seeing anything all the way through. For reasons that should be obvious, the topsy-turvy secondary-world fantasy has become the defining text for the human condition around the turn of the millennium, most bluntly (excluding Tim Burton's recent film) in 'The Matrix' (1999). Want to understand how subprime mortgages brought about fiscal Armageddon? Go ask Alice. How did Robert Mugabe, George Bush or Silvio Berlusconi conduct themselves in power? Off with their heads.

In an extract from her book 'British Animation: The Channel 4 Factor' (2008), included in the booklet for this BFI dual-format Blu-ray/DVD release, Clare Kitson considers Jan Svankmajer's status as a Czech surrealist, too non-specific to be actually persecuted in the former Czechoslovakia but too disturbing to be encouraged officially. She then outlines the incredibly complex manner in which, before the Prague Spring, international financing was arranged for Svankmajer's first feature film. The upshot, in a manner of which Lewis Carroll would have approved, was the Czech delegation to the Berlin Film Festival becoming "decidedly discomfited by the buzz around this Swiss feature they knew nothing about, made in Prague by Jan Svankmajer".

Rather than tackle the entire book (which, in various ways, has been tackled by Disney and Jonathan Miller, as well as Burton), Svankmajer called his adaptation 'Neco z Alenky' ('Something of Alice') and melds Carroll with his own concerns, dotting familiar bits with his own recurrent images. Instead of disappearing down



Topsy-turvy world: Kristina Kohoutová in 'Alice'

Glum blonde Alice crawls into a writing desk and worms her way into Wonderland

a rabbit-hole, this glum blonde Alice (Kristina Kohoutová) crawls into the drawer of the writing desk – which is somehow like a raven – and worms her way into Wonderland among discarded compasses and protractors. When she quaffs from the 'drink me' bottle, she not only shrinks but turns into a china-faced doll as blankly unsettling as any of the other inhabitants of Svankmajer's magical yet violent, hostile and noisy universe of discarded Victoriana. Here, the March Hare is stuffed and pulls out the nails through his paws which crucify him to the base of his display, and has to sew himself shut to keep his sawdust insides from leaking. Alice and the White Rabbit are the continuing characters – Kitson notes that she prefers the version of the feature parcelled up into self-contained episodes as a television serial, though the option to view the feature that way isn't included – and Carroll's other players also show up, trapped in their sections of the story and by an animator as wont to pin his creations down as to let them go free.

Almost all Alice adapters take cues from the Tenniel illustrations, but Svankmajer imagines the Mad Hatter, the Court Cards, the Frog and Fish Footmen, the Caterpillar and others as if they had never been shown before. He makes use of the fact, unremarked in most Alices, that playing cards have identical backs, and has his cut-outs turn to show the same pattern. His own business sprouts images like the nails

that extrude from a loaf of bread, a cow's tongue and a steak writhing amid the machine parts, watches slathered with thick butter, heads snapped off by scissors out of Struwwelpeter, the grinding repetition ("I want a clean cup," said the Mad Hatter, "let's move over one place") that turns social occasions into an industrial process (easy to see why this notion sticks in an animator's mind), the dormouse in a sailor suit caught in a neck-snapping trap.

This new release from the BFI offers both Blu-ray and DVD versions, which might defeat a Pepsi test, since both faithfully reproduce the seamy look of the film. Czech and English voice tracks (in English, Alice is played by Camilla Power) are included – purists will go with the Czech and subtitles, but the English is aptly Carrollian (with no attempt to sync lips).

Besides a booklet which includes valuable contributions from Kitson, Philip Strick (a typically perceptive review from the 'Monthly Film Bulletin'), Michael Brooke and others, the extras run to a British 1903 'Alice in Wonderland' (also included on the BFI release of Miller's television version, though here it's a new restoration), two Alice-ish Quay Brothers music videos, and a couple of oddities from the vault, 'Elsie and the Brown Bunny' (1921), a promotional film from Cadbury's chocolate factory, and 'Alice in Label Land' (1974), a cartoon from the Ministry of Information which uses Alice to explain the ins and outs of new food-labelling regulations. Absent, presumably on the grounds that anyone who wants this will already own the BFI's Svankmajer shorts collection, is 'Jabberwocky', his earlier venture into the world of Lewis Carroll.

NEW RELEASES

Adua and Her Friends

Antonio Pietrangeli; Italy 1960; Rare Video/Region 1 NTSC; 129 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: introduction, restoration documentary, booklet, Pietrangeli short 'Girandola 1910'

Film: A conscientiously tawdry post-neorealism artefact that saw wide global release in the 1960s and was then promptly forgotten, Pietrangeli's film opens like a spaghetti noir on the night-time streets of Rome, and in a grubby brothel on the eve of its closure thanks to a new post-war law. There we meet the chin-out sassiness of four sisters in the craft: tough Adua (Simone Signoret), dim hotsy Lolita (Sandra Milo), unbalanced Marilina (Emmanuelle Riva) and mousey Milly (Gina Rovere), all of whom decide to evade the long-term eventualities of whoredom and instead pool their resources to open a country trattoria in the ruins of a cavernous villa. From here the film echoes Julien Duvivier's *La Belle Equipe* (1936), another saga of an ad hoc restaurateur micro-community battling against the pressures of bureaucratic society. But of course Pietrangeli's girls face bigger problems, as their past follows them into the sunshine and their licence to operate is funded by a shady operative who demands a pimp's share of their upstairs action.

The actors, handicapped a bit by the declamatory Italian overdubbing, are all fine, particularly Rovere, who has a wounding stare and whose character ends up with the most to lose. (Refreshing as always, Marcello Mastroianni shows up, irrelevantly, as a tangential love interest for Signoret's bullish man-hater.) Pietrangeli, who began as Visconti's screenwriter after the war, is more of a visual explorer than character builder, and *Adua* is filthy with rich atmosphere, roving camera inquisitiveness and flat-out breathtaking cinematography, including what may be the loveliest passage in DP Armando Nannuzzi's long and varied career: Rovere's soured maiden wandering out into the hillsides at dusk, where a castle looms in the middle ground and fireflies swoop in the grass.

The heroines aren't merely exploited women standing up for themselves: the four ladies openly lament that they can no longer just do sex work, instead of the around-the-clock labour of running an eatery. But *Adua* is a tragedy, one that slowly winds around to a crushing coda which keeps faith with the New Wave era's sense of hardbitten realism and outcast pathos.

Disc: Beautifully restored and transferred, with the kind of extras that count: critical exegesis, and *Girandola 1910*, Pietrangeli's contribution to the full-colour omnibus *Amori di mezzo secolo* (1954), which turns out to be a brisk and rather Berlusconi-esque comedy about a doctor's rise to eminence by lying about patients' 'exhaustion' and thereby helping a succession of Belle Epoque aristocrats extricate themselves from adulterous relationships. (MA)

Apocalypse Now

Francis Ford Coppola; US 1979; Optimum Releasing/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 153 minutes (1979 version)/202 minutes (redux version); Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: commentaries, documentaries (including 'Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse'), interviews (John Milius, Martin Sheen, Francis Ford Coppola), deleted/additional scenes, archive radio production ('The Mercury Theatre on Air: Heart of Darkness')

Film: Francis Ford Coppola once proposed to open his Joseph Conrad-inspired Vietnam meditation-cum-hallucination exclusively at a purpose-built cinema in the geographical centre of the US (Kansas was mooted), where it would run for a decade as a tourist attraction ("like Mount Rushmore"). Like many of his wilder notions, this quickly bit the dust, but it sums up the megalomaniacal zeal with which Coppola approached the *Apocalypse Now* package: not a mere film but a veritable monument. But he wasn't far wrong, and American cinema has been much the poorer for the dearth of similarly crazed ambition over the past 30-odd years. *Apocalypse* versus *Avatar*? No contest.

Discs: This mammoth Blu-ray triple-decker must surely be definitive. Disc one features both cuts of the film in superlative digital restorations (in the 35mm aspect ratio, not the cropped 70mm one), plus Coppola commentaries. Disc two contains several hours of extras covering just about every base (the highlights are Orson Welles's 1938 Mercury Theatre radio adaptation of *Heart of Darkness*, plus lengthy and disarmingly candid conversations with John Milius and Martin Sheen), while disc three contains the now classic documentary *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse* (previously only available on VHS or imported DVD) plus an amusingly record-straightening commentary from both Francis and Eleanor Coppola. (MB)

Araya

Margot Benacerraf; Venezuela 1959; Milestone/Region 1 NTSC; 82 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: interviews, documentaries, audio commentaries, Benacerraf's 'Reveron' (1953), downloadable PDF file of filmmaker's scrapbook snapshots (with Rossellini, Picasso, Buñuel et al)

Film: Unearthed and restored in 2009 from the bowels of neglected film history, Benacerraf's film has long been one of those titles you happen upon in the annals of major film festival awards (it shared the International Critics Prize at



Adua and Her Friends Pietrangeli's film is filthy with rich atmosphere, roving camera inquisitiveness and flat-out breathtaking cinematography

Cannes with *Hiroshima mon amour*) but never get to see. A piece of swoony anthropological cinema, the movie chronicles the lives of the salt workers on the titular Venezuelan peninsula, an arid wasteland where salt extraction is the only native industry, laboured at by exploited peasants around the clock.

Though Benacerraf may have had progressive-social purposes behind her demi-documentary (everything about it is staged for the camera, in the tradition of Robert Flaherty, whose films *Araya* closely models) but most of the film's energy is visual. The landscape itself is hardly something a smart filmmaker could pass up: a desert paradise pocked by poverty and, best of all, lorded over by monstrous, three-storey-high snow-white trapezoidal pyramids of salt, the workers tending and adding to them like termites on a mound. Benacerraf, an industry legend in her native Venezuela and an arthouse hobnobber in the middle century, knew that the surreal, abstracted forms were what mattered, and her DP Giuseppe Nisoli (who has no other credit on

IMDb) captures this alien no-man's-land with a silvery beauty that rivals Sergei Urusevsky's work with Mikhail Kalatozov, minus the infrared.

The arresting monochromatic sheen of the film is certainly more convincing and alluring than the patronising Flaherty-esque narration or the half-hearted attempts to craft relatable characters out of the camera-tolerant Venezuelans busy at their gruelling day job. In fact, in attending so relentlessly to endless labour in one of the world's arduous corners, the film attains a Sisyphusian grandeur, and plays as both a hymn to the place and time, as Benacerraf intended, and as a preamble to films such as Michael Glawogger's *Workingman's Death* (2005), itself a document of extreme wage-slave industry as gorgeous as it is distressing. **Disc:** Lovely to look upon, and the Benacerraf-eulogising supplements are fascinating. (MA)

Bicycle Thieves

Vittorio De Sica; Italy 1948; Arrow Films/Dual Format DVD and Blu-ray; Region 2/B; Certificate U; 89/85 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: audio commentary by Robert Gordon, 'Cesare Zavattini' documentary (Blu-ray only), 'Timeless Cinema' documentary on Vittorio De Sica, booklet essay by Michael Brooke, Cesare Zavattini essay 'Some Ideas on the Cinema', original trailer

Film: So much a touchstone of Italian neorealism that it has received the cinematic equivalent of canonisation, De Sica's masterpiece is both splendidly buffed-up (right down to the worn check of the hero's jacket) and impressively reappraised in this covetable release. Robert Gordon's wide-ranging commentary winds sympathetically around

Antonio and Bruno's father-and-son search for the stolen bicycle vital for Antonio's work, illuminating the physical and emotional topography of the film. Particularly fascinating are his analyses of the elaborate textures De Sica builds up with music and camera movements that contradict the film's near-documentary realist status, as the Piazza Vittorio market search thrums with anxiety, or Antonio paces in dread, prior to his own attempted bicycle theft. As well as teasing out the elements of this rich anthropological picture of a city, Gordon identifies the formal threads within scenes that give this male melodrama such emotional heft (that final crowd plucking at the humiliated father, Alfredo the thief flailing in a fit or a faint), and embraces rather than excuses the film's sentimentality. By filling out rather than flattening the film's effects with theory, it's one of those rare readings that can change your long-held view of a classic. **Disc:** A nice crisp transfer, well balanced and not overly fiddled with (there's a thesis to be written on the 'grain versus digital noise reduction' wars raging between Blu-ray enthusiasts). Cesare Zavattini's stern 1953 neorealist manifesto-cum-essay ("The true function of the cinema is not to tell fables") provides a bracing addition to this package's contemporary scholarship, and the densely detailed vintage Italian documentary on De Sica leaves no stone unturned. (KS)

The Bridge on the River Kwai

David Lean; 1957 UK; Sony/Region-free Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 161 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.55:1; Features: making-of featurette, picture-in-graphics track, John Milius introduction, 'Steve Allen Show' excerpt, vintage featurettes, booklet, trailers, BD-Live content

Film: A positive aspect of the newly minted high-res classics continuing to head our way is an encouragement to look again at canonical films we'd otherwise rather taken for granted. A longtime staple of UK television schedules, David Lean's Oscar-winning saga of the Burma railway is a case in point, too easily bracketed alongside other bank holiday-filling epics of wartime derring-do like *The Guns of Navarone* and *The Great Escape*. True, while the film certainly delivers an adventure quotient of commando raids, jungle combat and pre-CGI spectacle, it's primarily a character-led conflict of ideas rather than an action picture. Alec Guinness's (Oscar-winning) Colonel Nicholson remains wedded to inflexible notions of fair play and dignity, Hayakawa Sessue's prison-camp commander to the bushido code, William Holden's US Navy interloper to self-serving cynicism – resulting in a tragic futility in which nobody gets what they want. The absence of button-pushing triumphalism is striking, as indeed is the long game played by Lean's direction. His tendency to painstaking expansionism later got the better of him (cf the dread *Ryan's Daughter*)



Welcome to the jungle: 'Apocalypse Now'

NEW RELEASES

but the way in which the slow-building finale eschews short-term impact in favour of sustained, inexorable undertow is a masterly display of a filmmaker confidently holding his nerve in avoidance of the obvious. If you think you know this film, think again.

Disc: The new 4K restoration from the original negative looks decidedly sharper and better colour-balanced than previous DVD editions. Disappointingly, most of the extras (including a worthwhile Laurent Bouzereau 'making of') are the same, the significant innovation being a curious 'picture-in-graphics track' that boxes the film into a compact frame augmented by a series of captioned historical factoids and production tidbits. Did we really need to be told which nations were on the Allied and Axis sides during WWII? (TT)

The Clowns

Federico Fellini; Italy/France/Germany 1970; Raro Video/Region 1; 92 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: Fellini short 'Un'agenzia matrimoniale', 'Fellini's Circus' visual essay, illustrated booklet

Film: Fellini's tribute to the world of clowns as he first experienced it – the tawdry, garish, frightening figures of the 1920s and 30s – began life as a television project. After making the

autobiographical *A Director's Notebook* for NBC in 1969, he saw the television essay form as an ideal way of creating a more imaginative version of the classic documentary, deploying a fake onscreen film crew (headed by Fellini himself conducting interviews) and elaborate scenes of recreation and fantasy. It was a concept he would develop further with his next feature *Roma*.

The Clowns begins with a childhood memory of Fellini first witnessing a circus in Rimini, a magical sequence that owes a great deal to Winsor McCay's comic strip *Little Nemo*. Then the adult director and his eccentric crew (including a sound man who insists on bringing his mother along with him) begin their journey to find the retired clowns of yesteryear, especially in Paris, where some remnant of the old traditions survive at the Cirque d'hiver. A few cameos are thrown in – Anita Ekberg on the hunt for a tiger cub, Pierre Etaix and his then wife Annie Fratellini keeping the old spirit of the circus alive – as well as the reflections of an eminent clown historian. As he tracks down some former great names, Fellini is even obliged to retain their distinctive voices and for once use the live sound from his shoot, complete with some ferocious camera noise.

The two archetypes of the White Clown (representing law and authority)



Murder in mind: 'Les Diaboliques'

and Augusto (the anarchist and rebel) are explored throughout, with the climax of the film being a highly staged and riotously flamboyant clown's funeral in a big top, one of Fellini's greatest set pieces, accompanied by a thrillingly upbeat Nino Rota score. The director was determined not to be caught out being pretentious on the subject: when an onscreen critic asks about the film's meaning, a well-timed bucket falls neatly on his head.

Disc: An excellent restored transfer of the full-frame version, far preferable to the horizontally cropped, widescreen presentation available on a French DVD. Adriano Aprà's essay is especially illuminating on the background to the film and the place of the circus in Fellini's work. (DT)

Les Diaboliques

Henri-Georges Clouzot; France 1955; Arrow Films/Dual Format DVD and Blu-ray/Region 0/ABC; Certificate 12; 117 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: audio commentary by Susan Hayward, filmed interview with Ginette Vincendeau, booklet essay by Brad Stevens, reprinted interview with Clouzot by Paul Schrader, original trailer

Film: Never mind the thematic checklist and *mise en scène* truffle hunt (that famous stagnant pool equalling stinking morals) to establish Clouzot as 'the French Hitchcock', good though they are. The interesting question raised by this stylish release is whether Véra Clouzot's affecting but tinny turn as the weak-hearted wife was the accidental grit that turned this legendarily pitch-black psychological thriller into a pearl. Susan Hayward's excellent if pedagogic commentary underlines how Clouzot heterosexualised Boileau-Narcejac's lesbian murder novel primarily to showcase his wife, and notes that Simone Signoret is often relegated to shared shots and held in half tones, to disguise Véra's less expressive performance. So Clouzot's uxorious boosterism becomes part of the film's tremendous visual cunning, another pleasure to savour alongside the Sapphic undercurrents, the all-pervading cruelty and the peeling

gothic decay of Léon Barsacq's production design. Arrow's decision to take the academic rather than the anecdotal route for its classic film commentaries is vindicated here: the expert dissection of Clouzot's ghost-ride of a finale, a symphony of heart-stopping sounds and frighteners, even allows those of us who find the denouement as creaky as the doors to marvel at its construction.

Disc: The transfer is generally good, if a tad soft in places, though the inky shadows might well reflect Clouzot's own taste – "For me, the great rule is to push the contrasts as far as they will go," he observes to Paul Schrader in a sharp, faintly confessional 1969 interview included in the essay booklet. A video interview with *S&S* contributor Ginette Vincendeau provides a thoughtful overview of Clouzot's career (though it cries out for illustrative clips), and Barsacq's crepuscular sketches earn their inclusion. (KS)

Gaumont Treasures Volume 2 1908-1916

Emile Cohl/Jean Durand/Jacques Feyder and early masters of French cinema; France 1908-16; Kino/Region 1 NTSC; 598 minutes total; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: Durand biographical documentary short, early colour and sound experiments from Gaumont

Films: This second monster omnibus from Kino further upturns the apple cart of what film-history-text guru David Bordwell terms the "standard version" of film history, which likes to give D.W. Griffith credit for pioneering the essential syntax of poetic storytelling. Of course, this isn't news any more, as home video has financed the restoration of more early century cinema than anyone's had access to before, and we get to rewrite the evolution of style. The most glaring example here is Jean Durand's *Le Railways de la mort* (1912), a rather thrilling 17-minute epic (made the same year as Griffith's *The New York Hat*) that plays like a model for von Stroheim's *Greed*, involving two western prospectors who engage in a crazed chase/battle of wits over a map via train,

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horse and automobile, until they both expire in a climactic conflagration. Griffith's contemporaneous work, and work to come, looks stolid, unadventurous and reactionary by comparison, but Durand is a find for other reasons: he was Gaumont's raucous comedy genius, and from 1911 onwards, alternating between three oafish central clown characters (Calino, Zigoto and Onésime), he crafted breakneck farces often entailing a runaway-train force (a car, a pair of idiot rugby teams, even literally a runaway train) bulldozing through one domestic scenario (weddings, restaurants, shops, construction sites) after another and leaving them in wild ruin. Amid the foofaraw you can almost always spot the iconic frame of a young Gaston Modot, who made almost 200 films with Durand, up until the late 1920s.

The Cohl collection here is indispensable, featuring 39 shorts from only the first three years (1908-10) of one of animation's most fecund careers, and their graphic energy, rangy wit and bizarre invention (Cohl was part of the pre-Dada, pre-surrealist group the Incoherents) had no proper equal until the Fleischers began exploring their own battery of handmade fetishes and amusements a decade later.

The third disc begins with Jacques Feyder's first, strangely claustrophobic comic shorts and then ropes in films by Romeo Bosetti, Gaston Ravel, Henri Fescourt and others, including a handful of 'anonymous' works (the opposite of the lost film, these are available to us while their authorship is not), most of them zestier, livelier and more experimental than any Hollywood films made in the same year.

Discs: Restored by a number of international archives, the films are gloriously old, and the extras – early sound trials, colour tests from the teens, behind-the-scenes footage of production at Gaumont – are a cinephile's catnip, as is the short documentary about Durand, certainly this release's major figure. The DVD's new music is appropriate, if often repeated to the point of irritation. (MA)

Go Go Tales

Abel Ferrara; Italy 2007; MediaFilm/Region 2; 100 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: trailer, promotional extracts

Film: Lost in limbo after doing the festival rounds in 2007, New York maverick Abel Ferrara's second film made during his Rome residency, after 2005's *Mary* (it was shot entirely on a studio set at Cinecittà), proves to be one of his most endearing. On a plot level, however, it's paper thin. Big-hearted dreamer Ray Ruby (Willem Dafoe) runs a Manhattan nightclub called Paradise, where lap-dancing and pole gymnastics are the main attraction. He's being hounded by his backers – a bellicose lady (Sylvia Miles) and his brother Johnny (Matthew Modine), a successful hairdresser – who threaten to close him down, while his performers scream to be paid and threaten to strike. Meanwhile Ray is secretly playing

the lottery, wins the jackpot, but then can't find the ticket. That's about it.

But it emerges that the real theme of the film is that everyone here dreams of far, far better things, as at one point the club closes for Ray to introduce a series of varied cabaret acts by his resident dancers in the hope of attracting agents. The film is, then, less like past Ferrara dramas speaking of tortured Catholicism and narcotic delinquency and more of a piece with the wispy melancholy of Altman's *A Prairie Home Companion* (2006) and (most obviously) Cassavetes' *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1976). Although the camera lovingly prowls around the dancers' bodies, the attitude is closer to innocence than seediness, with the very loose, improvisatory script underlining the comedic in place of generating any tension. Only Asia Argento's scary turn both on stage (she notoriously French kisses her large pet dog) and off disturbs this fairytale ambience, which curiously reflects Ferrara's outsider status in an industry where his focus on atmosphere, human unpredictability and the sheer messiness of life hasn't often been seen as a creative virtue. One for his (few?) fans, then.

Disc: The cinematography by Fabio Cianchetti (who worked on Bertolucci's last films) is fluid and evocative. It's an Italian release, and the original English track can be played without subtitles. The extras feature the complete performances by some of the actors/dancers, including the irrepressible Ms Argento and her canine friend. (DT)

Kiss Me Deadly

Robert Aldrich; US 1955; Criterion/Region 1; 106 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: audio commentary, Alex Cox's video tribute, Mickey Spillane documentary, excerpts from A.I. Bezzerides documentary, video pieces on film's

locations, alternative ending, theatrical trailer, book with J. Hoberman essay and a 1955 reprint by Robert Aldrich

Film: The Mike Hammer of *Kiss Me Deadly* isn't a particularly brilliant detective but a 'bedroom dick' whose divorce business relies on pimping his secretary, his ratiocination technique on briskly administered face slaps. Played by Ralph Meeker, he has the good looks of a Midwestern, ex-high-school athlete – what's usually called 'All American' – but he's a cussed, mercenary philistine who saunters into low life with the bemused half-smile of a winner-who-knows-it-among-losers.

Shot in 21 days and released in May of that paradigm-shift year 1955, *Kiss Me Deadly* was directed by Robert Aldrich from a screenplay by proletarian poet A.I. 'Buzz' Bezzerides, taking plot incident and little else from Mickey Spillane's sixth novel starring his hugely popular skull-cracking hero Hammer. The narrator of a DVD documentary supplement about crew-cut Spillane, a "blue-collar writer of comic books", calls it "a left-wing attempt by Aldrich to undermine and criticise the conservative Spillane". In a recorded introduction, Alex Cox reveals that "disguised as a tough-guy detective picture", *Kiss Me Deadly* "is actually an anti-nuclear parable with classical allusions".

"Actually," *Kiss Me Deadly* is both things – it wouldn't have any shelf life if it weren't a pluperfect genre film in which every investigative episode has its own kook rhythm. The mongrel authorship contributes to the feeling of a movie that coalesced out of the atmosphere rather than being storyboarded. Gross contrasts define this film, not least that between the rotting filigree of the previous century, in the gingerbread boarding houses and faded gentility of LA's Bunker Hill

neighbourhood where Hammer does his snooping, and the streamlined Atomic Age that he's the avatar of, with his clean-machine Jaguar XK120 and neat-as-a-pin mid-century-modern Wilshire Boulevard bachelor pad. The concluding white-light apocalypse is Armageddon as the epitome of 1950s tidiness: the Big One as Big Disinfectant. **Disc:** A typically loaded Criterion disc, with contextualising extras and a learned commentary by Alain Silver and James Ursini. Opening with the blackest night in *noir*, every subsequent frame is buffed and waxed. (NP)

Ogro

Gillo Pontecorvo; Italy/Spain/France 1979; Cristaldi/Dolmen Home Video/Region 2; 111 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: interview with Pontecorvo, history of Operation Ogro

Film: The original release of *Ogro*, Gillo Pontecorvo's last feature, appears to have been limited to the countries that produced it, so the arrival of this Italian DVD offers a rare chance to see what followed *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) and *i Queimada!* (1968). Perhaps international distributors were reluctant at the time to take on a film dealing with the Basque terrorist movement ETA: though there have recently been several declarations of ceasefire, in the year *Ogro* was made the organisation's activities were still a cause of controversy and bloodshed.

Pontecorvo's film covers the famous Operation Ogro – in which Spain's then prime minister Luis Carrero Blanco was assassinated in Madrid – from the perspective of two time frames: events leading up to the fatal bomb blast in 1973, and the activities of those involved five years on and three years after the death of Franco brought the collapse of fascism. The dramatic focus is on the conflict between the two lead terrorists, Txabi (Eusebio Poncela), who believes in violence and assassination as the only solution, and Izarra (Gian Maria Volonté), who stresses the need for restraint and, post-Franco, peaceful negotiation. The heart of the film is of course a detailed build-up to the actual assassination, which involved creating a tunnel under a main street to plant the explosives that sent the prime minister's car up into the air and over a five-storey building.

While the tension is well delivered as the operation gets under way, and the flying car is highly convincing, Pontecorvo's direction is elsewhere disappointingly flat, with the script too often at the service of political arguments rather than persuasive characterisation. Matters aren't helped by the dubbing of everyone – in this version – in Italian. It especially makes nonsense of an early scene in which Basque schoolchildren – and future terrorists – refuse to speak Spanish, and another in Madrid where a young girl (Ana Torrent, of *The Spirit of the Beehive* fame) recognises the bomb team as fellow Basques. There is a suggestion of Catholic iconography in the final scene in which Txabi appears Christ-like in



Kiss Me Deadly A pluperfect genre film... taking plot incident and little else from Spillane's sixth novel starring his skull-cracking hero Mike Hammer

Western promise

Jacques Tourneur is known for noir and horror. But, argues Tim Lucas, his westerns were every bit as extraordinary

Stars in My Crown

Jacques Tourneur; US 1950; Warner Archive Collection; 89 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: original US trailer

Wichita

Jacques Tourneur; US 1955; Warner Archive Collection; 81 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1

Best remembered for his extraordinary work at RKO Radio Pictures in the 1940s – notably the Val Lewton-produced 'Cat People', 'I Walked with a Zombie' and 'The Leopard Man', and the film noir classic 'Out of the Past' – Jacques Tourneur also deserves attention as one of the finest directors of westerns. As with his work in horror and noir, Tourneur's westerns are uncommonly humanistic, more attuned to internal shadings and conflicts of morality and spirit than to traditional gunplay. In 1946, he made the splendid 'Canyon Passage' for Universal, starring Dana Andrews and Brian Donlevy as morally opposed friends occupying the romantic indecision of sultry Susan Hayward; the backbone of his 1950s output was a series of Joel McCrea westerns that gave the 'Sullivan's Travels' lead some of his strongest credentials for starring in Sam Peckinpah's magisterial 'Ride the High Country' in 1962. Two of these long-unavailable films, 'Stars in My Crown' and 'Wichita', can now be had as burn-on-demand discs from Warner Archive, while the third ('Stranger on Horseback', 1955) remains difficult to see.

Shot in black and white with all the stellar resources of MGM, 'Stars in My Crown' is more southern than western, but it opens in a western-style saloon as Civil War veteran Josiah Doziah Gray (McCrea) arrives in 19th-century Walesburg and outdraws the first lost souls he meets for the right to preach them a sermon. The new parson's story is persuasively narrated by Marshall Thompson, playing the future tense of Josiah's watchful adopted son John (Dean Stockwell), the orphaned nephew of his wife Harriet (Ellen Drew), as the film settles into an episodic, Ambersonian ramble set during the years when men first put aside their guns to live in civility. Based on a 1947 novel by Joe David Brown ('Kings Go Forth', 'Paper Moon'), the film quickly but deftly sketches a riot of local colour – Jed Isbell (Alan Hale) and "enough tow-headed sons to start a Swedish Sunday school" (the tallest of them a young, unbilled James Arness), the mild and much bullied Chloroform Wiggins (Arthur Hunnicutt), the travelling medicine-show man Professor Jones (Charles Kemper),



Top gun: Joel McCrea in 'Wichita'

and craven Lon Backett (Ed Begley), a mine owner covetous of land owned by the ageing black farmer Uncle Famous Prill (Juano Hernandez), whose unambitious refusal to sell prompts a moonlight raid of hooded 'night riders' prepared to lynch him.

But the narrative's real point of conflict is between Josiah and young Doc Harris (James Mitchell), who replaces his dying father (Lewis Stone), courts pretty schoolteacher Faith Samuels (Amanda Blake, Arness's future 'Gunsmoke' co-star) and stands realistically opposed to the mysteries of faith embodied by the parson – a metaphysical dance of destiny that continues until an outbreak of typhoid brings them together in truce.

'Stars in My Crown' (ironically named for a cloying hymn disliked by the parson's wife) was Tourneur's personal favourite among his films, though he also viewed it as the moment of his professional downfall. His love for Margaret Fitts's script was such that he offered to direct the picture at no charge when producer William H. Wright couldn't afford him. Instead, Tourneur accepted a substantial pay cut which reflected badly on him when prospective employers subsequently inquired about his rate. Though half a dozen Tourneur pictures are more celebrated, 'Stars' is a perfectly made film, raucous with memorable characters and rich dialogue, which makes such an earnest case for the essential goodness of people that its most villainous character is not only redeemed at the end but, in a tiny detail reserved for second viewings, is the first to suggest the cause of the typhoid

Tourneur's westerns are uncommonly humanistic, attuned more to internal shadings and moral conflict than gunplay

outbreak. The trailer accompanying the feature is hosted by McCrea and contains unique footage.

'Wichita', in which McCrea plays Wyatt Earp, is a nicely complementary 'anti-western' – this time in (slightly reddish) Technicolor and CinemaScope – in which the retired buffalo hunter, tired of carrying a gun and looking to start a new business, follows a cattle drive to the Kansas town advertising itself as a place where "everything goes". When Earp foils an attempted bank robbery, local officials invite him to become their town marshal, but he refuses. Fate intervenes at nightfall when drunken cattlemen (led by Lloyd Bridges and those great western heavies Robert Wilke and Jack Elam) proceed to shoot up the town, killing a young boy in the process. Much as Parson Gray was able to disperse a mob of Klansmen with no more ammunition than pointed words, the newly badged Earp convinces the rowdies to drop their weapons without firing a shot, leading to an admiring newspaper account account by Bat Masterson (Keith Larsen) and the respect of the town. But Earp's popularity sours among the officials who hired him – including the father (Walter Coy) of his love interest Laurie (Vera Miles) – when the lawman asserts his authority by forbidding the public to carry firearms.

'Wichita' is given pleasing complexity by Tourneur's attention to the unexpected detail. The film's most powerful sequence comes when Earp, not yet marshal, pays an after-hours visit to the newspaper office of Masterson's employer, played by 1940s B movie great Wallace Ford. Here the story stops for nearly six minutes as the men reflect on the events of the day, Ford literally drinking himself past the point of intelligibility. No guns are drawn, but all the film's drama is concentrated in this sequence as Ford drowns the memory of the night his wife was killed in one of the cattlemen's shoot-'em-ups, and numbs his dread that the sun is setting in preparation for another.

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his hospital bed, a tendency underlined by Ennio Morricone's Bach-like music at that point. But overall Pontecorvo is characteristically at pains to give a balanced, objective view to the Basque cause, and at the same time not to make caricatures out of the fascists.

Disc: A good transfer. Adequate English subtitles are provided for the film but unfortunately not for the extras. (DT)

Films by Ozu Yasujiro

Late Autumn/A Mother Should Be Loved

Japan 1960/34; BFI/Dual Format DVD and Blu-ray; Region 2/B; Certificate PG; 123 minutes (129 minutes Blu-ray)/70 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: booklet

An Autumn Afternoon/A Hen in the Wind

Japan 1962/48; BFI/Dual Format DVD and Blu-ray; Region 2/B; Certificate PG; 108 minutes (112 minutes Blu-ray)/80 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: booklet

Films: The latest quartet of films to emerge from the BFI's ongoing Ozu survey begins with a torso: the silent feature *A Mother Should Be Loved* is missing its first and last reels. This is less damaging than one might expect, since they consisted of a distinct prologue and coda, replaced here by onscreen synopses. What's left is the meat of the story of the often fraught relationship between two stepbrothers and the woman they call 'mother', who only bore one of them and overcompensates by favouring her stepchild at his brother's expense. It's more overtly melodramatic than Ozu's later work but the heightened emotions are delivered with impressive conviction, perhaps because of parallels with the director's own life at the time (his father died during pre-production).

A Hen in the Wind is Ozu's bleakest study of the deprivations of the post-war era. Thanks to the absence of her husband Shuichi (Sano Shuji), away on military service, Tokiko (Tanaka Kinuyo) is forced into temporary prostitution in order to pay hospital bills after her young son falls ill. But little of this is actually shown, partly due to censorship but also because Ozu is far more interested not only in the psychological impact on the couple's relationship but also in the sociological background, depicted most vividly through the obsessively curious Shuichi's investigation into how the local brothel functions and what compels its employees to work there.

Late Autumn returns to the territory of its near-namesake *Late Spring* and also stars Hara Setsuko, though this time as the widowed parent Akiko rather than the shy but eminently marriageable daughter Noriko. Superficially a light comedy of manners about the attempted arranged marriage of Akiko's daughter Ayako (three of Akiko's late husband's friends take it upon themselves to act as matchmaker), it becomes a far more profound reflection on gender relations and tradition versus modernity in an increasingly westernised society, best summed up by the delicious scene in

which Ayako's more outspoken friend Yuriko (Okada Mariko) berates the trio for their interference. The earlier film is undoubtedly the more moving, but this has a comic deftness more characteristic of Ozu's final films.

This is equally true of his very last film, *An Autumn Afternoon*, which touches on similar thematic material when twentysomething Michiko (Iwashita Shima) worries that marriage might leave her father (Ryu Chishu) friendless and abandoned, while he actively wants her married in order to avoid ending up like his former schoolmaster's sour-faced daughter. But the matchmaking is just one strand of a rich social tapestry that also explores attitudes to the war (patriotism versus ironic detachment), consumer-driven family life (Michiko's brother buys expensive golf clubs instead of a more needed fridge) and the lasting emotional impact left by a loved one's departure either through death or simply growing up. Ozu's characteristic visual style is at its most refined in the two late films but is more than embryonic in 1934: his fondness for static yet oddly expressive shots of empty corridors cuts across the decades.

Discs: Released as separate double bills. The later Agfacolor titles are presented on Blu-ray and DVD in pin-sharp transfers from well-preserved prints only occasionally marred by mild exposure fluctuation. The older films are on DVD only: *A Mother Should Be Loved* is in remarkably good condition for its age, and while *A Hen in the Wind* is a tad murky, it's never at the expense of watchability. (MB)

Pale Flower

Shinoda Masahiro; Japan 1964; **Criterion/Region 1 DVD/Region A Blu-ray;** 96 minutes; **Aspect Ratio 2.35:1;** **Features:** new Shinoda interview, selected-scene commentary by Takemitsu Toru scholar Peter Grilli, essay by Chuck Stephens

Film: A super-cool black orchid of a Japanese *noir*, Shinoda's seminal yakuza saga is now a revered classic among Nipponophiles but is far less known in the west, where the historical milieu of Shinoda's fatalistic *Double Suicide* (1969) more suited the middle-class appetite. *Pale Flower* also initiated a new genre – the *bakuto-eiga*, or gambling film –



An Autumn Afternoon A rich social tapestry that also explores attitudes to family life and the lasting emotional impact left by a loved one's departure

but every fibre of the movie, thematic and visual, delivers an existential blast of modern doom, as rich and pure as a Coltrane saxophone wail. Right here, it seems, Japan inherited the authentic *noir* gene from US films, as if its culture demanded it like none other. (But, at the same time, 1964 may have been the nation's new wave golden year, with landmark work coming from Teshigahara, Imamura, Shindo, Kobayashi, Masumura etc.)

Muraki (Ikebe Ryo) is a hitman who, returning to Tokyo and its gambling dens after doing time for a mob killing, immediately lays eyes on Saeko (Kaga Mariko), a doll-faced waif addicted to cards and generally pining for mindless thrills. Shinoda's story (co-written with Baba Ataru) is the duo's slow dance through losses and wins and yakuza politics towards each other, conjoining in a dangerous *pas de deux* mediated by suicidal risk and mutual nihilism.

Shinoda's achievement, though, is less psychological than cultural – the film seems to intend its own iconic thrust, and every extraordinary Shochiku Grandscope shot is a vision of post-war

Japan as a dark underworld corridor seething with secrets and moral emptiness. It's a movie of rash, savage contrasts – within the images and between them, dialectic-style and the details are haunting, from the rattle of the shuffling *hanafuda* cards to the ticking clocks filling the flat of Muraki's ex-girlfriend to Saeko's unfashionably fashionable 1960s accoutrements, the moneyed accessories of a bruised, death-seeking femme who remains as much a mystery to us as she does to Muraki. (He has killed, he explains, "to survive", without realising that survival is exactly what interests Saeko least.) Mention should be made too of Toru Takemitsu's wild score, which bubbles under the action like a crank-jagged jazz orchestra playing from hell.

As the movie rolls inexorably towards its date with hopelessness and death, which is another mob hit performed in a crowded room with a huge knife and scored to an opera aria (the composition of this scene, Chuck Stephens maintains in his essay, explicitly recalls the 1960 assassination of socialist politician Asanuma Inejiro, caught on television during a rally), *Pale Flower* becomes a film that crystallises a generational moment, without excess or irony. **Disc:** Supplementally skimpy by Criterion standards. The new Shinoda interview is fine, and Stephens's essay is, typically, both trenchantly insightful and a hoot to read. The film's hypnotic widescreen images, digitally restored, are perfectly rendered. (MA)

Prostitute

Tony Garnett; 1980 UK; **BFI/Region 2;** Certificate 18; 98 minutes; **Aspect Ratio 1.78:1;** **Features:** booklet essays by Garnett, Jan Worth and Russell Campbell, Worth's 1979 documentary 'Taking a Part'

Film: Tony Garnett had been working with Ken Loach as story editor and

producer for a decade and a half before he turned out this solo feature as writer-producer-director. Not surprisingly, it's in a similar concerned social-realist vein, blending professional and non-professional performers and shot in a documentary-influenced style on 16mm – though its explicitly sexual subject-matter is definitely an avenue Loach's work has rarely explored.

Dividing its time between strands representing typical experiences for 'street girls' in Birmingham and another following a female social worker doggedly trying to organise the prostitutes into a campaigning group seeking changes in the law, it's slightly ungainly as storytelling, since the episodic construction lacks a certain momentum. Still, throughout it has that vivid feel of the dismal, dowdy, dun-hued early Thatcher-era Britain familiar from Alan Clarke and Les Blair's television work of the time.

Determinedly unglamorous and refusing to offer pat resolutions, Garnett's film retains a gnarly integrity, even if it's tangled in the contradiction of seeking to validate the girls' activities as a service job undeserving of moral opprobrium, all the while depicting the demands of the oldest profession as depressing and demeaning. Since the social issues remain just as relevant today, it's a welcome rerelease.

Disc: A good-looking transfer from the original negative restores brief scenes cut by the BBFC from the original theatrical release for sexual content. As a substantial adjunct, Jan Worth's 45-minute documentary *Taking a Part*, made while she was a film student at the Royal College of Art in 1979, offers a complementary slant on similar material. Radical in form, its self-reflexive elements have dated, yet its intimate portrait of working girls somehow feels piercingly authentic, notwithstanding a provocative approach that never allows us to discern fact from fabrication. (TJ)

Raffaello Matarazzo's Runaway Melodramas

Chains/Tormento/Nobody's Children/The White Angel

Italy 1949/50/52/55; Criterion Eclipse/Region 1; 94/98/96/100 minutes; **Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features:** liner notes

Films: Through the 1950s, against the advice of the intelligentsia, millions of Italians voted Christian Democracy, and flocked to Raffaello Matarazzo movies. Matarazzo's name is inextricably linked to his post-war jackpot in *strappalacrime* (the word has roughly the meaning of 'weepie') movies that fused star-crossed-lovers melodrama to the neorealistic milieu. Matarazzo's proscenium-arch staging restrains him from achieving Sirkian delirium, but his *strappalacrime* remain absorbing multi-climaxes of grovelling emotion, demotic storytelling sustaining Aldo De Benedetti's plot-twist-knotty scripts.

The four films comprising Eclipse's box-set were written by De Benedetti, released by Titanus films and star Yvonne Sanson and Amedeo Nazzari. ➡



House of cards: 'Pale Flower'

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← In each, the plot surrounds the splitting up of Sanson/Nazzari's family nucleus, and the deference of their reunion through a conspiracy of happenstance: wrongful imprisonments, purloined letters, ill-timed pregnancies and the meddling of irredeemable villains written to be hissed down by viewers. There is always a sentimental song and multiple overwhelmed collapses.

Nazzari, once compared to Errol Flynn for his athleticism and manicured moustache, may be remembered from his self-parodying part as 'Alberto Lazzari', the celebrity john who picks up Giulietta Masina in *Nights of Cabiria* (1957). If he teams well with Sanson, it's because he's physically equipped to handle such a strapping specimen. La Sanson's face is ever turbid with helpless emotion, while her rolling haunches bespeak profound resources of power. Greek-born, of mingled Slavic and Mediterranean blood, round, brown Sanson is seen at her best in the double role of 1955's *The White Angel*, playing the low-bred grifter 'actress' who heartsick Nazzari pursues, the very image of his lover who's disappeared into the nunnery (a women-in-prison interlude has De Benedetti at his most anything-goes).

Chains (1949), Matarazzo's breakthrough, features Sanson as the wife of Nazzari's Neapolitan mechanic, their domestic peace capsized by the reappearance of a crooked former lover. In *Tormento* (1950), the duo are torn asunder by Sanson's wicked stepmother and Nazzari's incarceration. As the aristocratic owner of a Carrera quarry and his lower-class lover, Nazzari and Sanson have hardly a moment's peace together at the beginning of *Nobody's Children* (1952) to establish their precious emotional bond – yet this poignant memory must endure through the full film and its sequel, *The White Angel*. By then, audiences knew that Nazzari and Sanson belonged together, axiomatically.

Discs: Fine liner notes are the only trimmings. All films show to good



Toilet humour: 'Taxi zum Klo'

advantage, with *The White Angel*, appropriately, the most nearly immaculate. (NP)

Requiem for a Vampire

Jean Rollin; France 1973; Redemption/Region O; Certificate 18; 88 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: trailer, stills galleries, publicity material, music video

Film: It takes half the running-time of this Jean Rollin movie for the viewer to determine whether the subtitle option is turned on: the long set-up is wordless, and dialogue (in French) remains sparse even when it becomes necessary. *Requiem for a Vampire* (aka *Vierges et Vampires*) delivers the ingredients of exploitation (action, nudity, violence, vampires) in a casual manner that must have played like an alienation effect in US grindhouses, where it was sold as *Crazed Virgins*. Even crucial plot details and character names are hard to determine, but the film offers a succession of striking, odd images. After a car chase with the police, two glum, pretty French girls dressed as clowns survive a wreck in which a man dies. They change into abbreviated outfits and drift into an unpopulated rural locale dominated by a vampire cult which is on the scout for virgins. Both are drawn to the cloaked, fanged patriarch but take different paths through his castle. Almost everything is provisional, and the heroines are so dissociated they might equally be villains before they get bitten. Like many of Rollin's films, it's hung up on its sulky, reticent, teasing leading ladies (Marie-Pierre Castel, Mireille Dargent) – and much of its peculiarity comes from their oddly offhand surrender to thuggish suitors, vampires with chains, an awakening bloodlust and rough sex. It's not among its auteur's best films but – apart from the lack of beach scenes – it is among his most Rollinesque.

Disc: A window-boxed 1.66:1 transfer from a clean source print offers the best-looking version of this title ever available on a home-video format. Still missing is a six-minute rape sequence once removed by the BBFC – though it was originally imposed on the film against the director's wishes,

so this is arguably closer to his vision. Film-specific extras are limited to the trailer and galleries of stills and publicity materials. There's also an unrelated music video. (KN)

Taxi Driver

Martin Scorsese; US 1976; Sony Pictures Entertainment/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 114 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: three commentaries, original script, trivia track, documentaries, New York location comparison, storyboards, stills galleries, trailer

Film: Most people under 50 will probably have seen Scorsese's masterpiece either on video or faded, battle-scarred 35mm prints looking almost as scuzzy as the porno film to which Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) takes Betsy (Cybill Shepherd) for one of film history's less well-judged dates. The new digital restoration removes that distancing and makes Travis's obsessive, desperately lonely universe something horribly tactile: one can almost smell the rotting flowers in his apartment, or the brandy and milk poured on to his cereal. Nocturnal NYC is illuminated by hellish reds and greens, though this newly enhanced vibrancy makes the MPAA-requested palette-muting of the film's blood-drenched climax that much more obviously compromised.

Disc: Sony has crammed a phenomenal amount on to one disc, but thankfully this is not to the detriment of a demonstration-quality transfer. There are three commentaries: Criterion's 1986 laser-disc one with Scorsese and writer Paul Schrader, a recent Schrader solo, and a critical analysis by Robert Kolker that's a model of an often awkward form. Schrader's original script can be superimposed over the film, as can trivia pop-ups. Numerous documentaries cover the filmmaking (the main 'making of' runs for 71 minutes), plus sociological spin-offs involving NYC cab drivers, former mayor Ed Koch and a split-screen opportunity to compare locations then and now. An extensive storyboard and picture gallery includes handwritten close-ups of Bernard Herrmann's score, accompanied by the recording. (MB)

Taxi zum Klo

Frank Ripploh; West Germany 1980; Peccadillo/Region 2; Certificate 18; 95 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9

Film: Technically unlicensed for screenings or video release in the UK until Film4 resubmitted it to the BBFC in 2005 (part of a raft of reassessed and similarly problematic films including *Salò*), *Taxi zum Klo*'s unflinching depiction of gay sex saw it more or less defined by the powers that be as a shameless bit of porno. The cuts required included scenes of fellatio, anal sex and golden showers which the director refused to countenance. Now finally cleared uncut for DVD release, *Taxi zum Klo* turns out not to be scary at all, and is indeed a rather charming and gently comedic period piece about a teacher cruising for sex in his hours off. Filmed just a few years before the arrival of Aids, it inevitably has a prelapsarian feel, though there's nothing particularly glamorous about its sex scenes, which – true to the aesthetic of the period – involve beards, skinny bodies and spotty backs.

Ripploh wrote, directed and cast himself as the main character, and he's surprisingly sympathetic. In some of the film's most daring juxtapositions, he's seen marking children's homework while trolling the toilets ('Klo') of the title, a solitary penis emerging from a glory hole; and a (real) sex education film warning children about paedophiles is astonishingly intercut with Ripploh teaching a boy in his own house. There's no sense of any kind that his character is a danger to children, quite the opposite in fact, but it's hard to think of such associations being edited like this today. There are resonances perhaps with Nanni Moretti in *Aprile* (1998), with the penis approximating the Sachertorte of Moretti's fancy; moreover there is an uncanny physical resemblance between the two directors, as well as a shared preoccupation with their own health.

This is a film about joy, despite its gloomy moments. It is furthermore a time capsule of the 1970s on a budget – design, morals, food. That of itself makes it a valuable document.

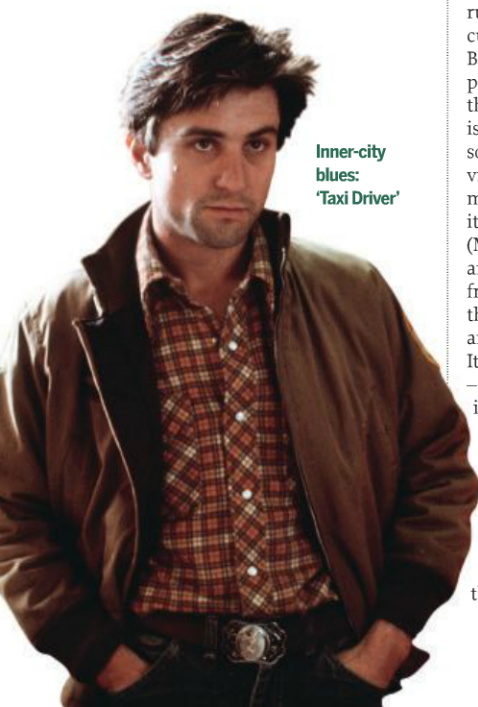
Discs: Extras include an introduction to the Film4 screening by Mark Kermode, a short history of *Taxi zum Klo*'s release in the UK with Archie Tait of the ICA, a German documentary on the film, and an interview with the director, 'Taxi to Cairo', which was an early title of the same film. (RC)

The Theo van Gogh Collection

Blind Date/1-900/Interview

Holland 1996/1994/2003; Network/Region 2; Certificate 18; 90/87/89 minutes; Aspect Ratio: tbc

Films: Theo van Gogh, stabbed to death by a Dutch-Moroccan extremist as he cycled through Amsterdam in 2004, was a brilliant polemicist and provocateur... but his filmmaking was very uneven. Like the populist politician Pim Fortuyn, whom he knew well and who was assassinated two years before,



Inner-city blues: 'Taxi Driver'

he had a knack for homing in on issues that made Dutch voters very uncomfortable. Both men were libertarian advocates of free speech who were accused of inflaming anti-Islamic prejudice; both used shock tactics – van Gogh was a television host who'd appear in drag on late-night shows and would write deliberately provocative newspaper columns. His 2004 short film *Submission*, written by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, highlighting the treatment of women under Islam, was hugely controversial thanks to its imagery of verses of the Qur'an written on a woman's body.

The personality of the filmmaker was reflected in his features. The three films in this collection are stylised chamber pieces which probe away at sexual, social and professional insecurity. (All three films in the 'trilogy' have been picked up for American remakes – Steve Buscemi and Stanley Tucci remade, respectively, *Interview* and *Blind Date*, and John Turturro was announced as director of *1-900*, though that film appears not to have been completed.) They're raw and intense but also highly contrived. *Interview*, for example, in which Pierre Bokma's political journalist is sent to interview a big-breasted soap opera actress (Katja Schuurman), has moments when the dialogue is as caustic and vicious as that in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* – van Gogh succeeds in exposing the snobberies of the journalist and the self-obsession of the actress, but the set-up and the plot twists strain credibility.

Blind Date is in a similar register – it's another two-hander, this time about a misanthropic comedian/conjuror and a bereaved mother who meet on dates in a bar, and – just as in *Interview* – have a series of conversations that are vicious, tender and loaded by turns. Meanwhile *1-900* owes a debt to Nicholson Baker's novella *Vox*; it's about two lonely professionals who meet through a sex line and start having regular and very frank conversations in which they play to each other's sexual fantasies. The problem is that, at feature length, a movie about two people talking on the phone risks becoming repetitive and claustrophobic.

Discs: This collection shows only a small aspect of van Gogh's work. It doesn't, for example, include his political thriller *06/05*, which was on a far bigger canvas than anything here. Given van Gogh's notoriety and the circumstances of his death, it's a pity there are no extras. Anyone wanting to find out more about him, his friendship with Fortuyn and his strange double life as free-speech advocate and filmmaker and public celebrity should check out Maartje Nevejan's excellent documentary *Theo van Gogh? Die Is Dood*. (GM)

This month's releases reviewed by Sergio Angelini, Michael Atkinson, Michael Brooke, Roger Clarke, Trevor Johnston, Geoffrey Macnab, Kim Newman, Nick Pinkerton, Kate Stables and David Thompson

Civilisation

BBC; UK 1969; 2entertain/Region 2; 650 minutes; Certificate E; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: interview with Sir David Attenborough, photo gallery, booklet

Programme: Revisiting this gloriously extravagant 13-part series in the pixel-dense splendour of HD, one becomes even more aware of its twin overriding ambitions: to broadcast to the nation a panoply of historical landmarks and to create a broadcasting monument for posterity. On the one hand there is Kenneth Clark's expansive treatise, as much a reflection on the history and art of the western world as a celebration of the plasticity of human endeavour in its most concrete of creative forms. But just as striking is how successfully it established the template for the globe-trotting, several-years-in-the-making BBC-authored documentary.

One can't help but feel that then, as now, it was intended as a monolithic corporate statement as well as a "Personal View by Lord Clark", serving the Reithian public-service broadcasting remit to "educate, inform and entertain". Correspondingly, though evidently produced with loving care, the aesthetics of its presentation are often flat and undramatic. This is particularly noticeable in the episode that includes several stagings from Shakespeare, including extracts from *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, with Ian Richardson as the great Dane and Patrick Stewart a very self-conscious Horatio.

Discs: Shot on 35mm as a showcase for the BBC's new colour service, this has been beautifully remastered in Hi Def. Not quite on the same level as Network's utterly superb Blu-ray presentation of *The Prisoner*, perhaps, but close. Extras weren't available for review. (SA)

Spyder's Web

ATV/ITV; UK 1972; Network DVD/Region 2; 658 minutes; Certificate 12; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: stills galleries, set designs

Programme: This offbeat espionage show tries very hard to be different and deserves brownie points for making its female lead both glamorous and brainy. Patricia Cutts is the spymaster who runs Arachnid Documentary Films as a cover for 'Spyder', a British black-ops unit. She assassinates commies and fellow travellers wherever she finds them but also has an itchy conscience. Her lieutenant (Anthony Ainley), a trigger-happy, thoroughly unconstructed walking anachronism swanning around in a vintage Lagonda, has no such qualms, however, and the show has a surprisingly high body count, despite the generally comedic tone.

Comparisons with *The Avengers* are inevitable and not entirely unwarranted given that the show's



Spyder's Web This offbeat espionage show deserves brownie points for making its female lead both glamorous and brainy

creator Richard Harris and script supervisor Malcolm Hulke were both veterans of that programme, but *Spyder's Web* has a lot of trouble deciding just how blackly comic it wants to be. Some of the writing can be quite crude at times and many episodes are just shaggy-dog stories, especially those by principal scriptwriter Roy Clarke, whose *Last of the Summer Wine* launched shortly afterwards – in fact Peter Sallis even appears in one of his episodes, which centres on a dodgy marriage agency.

The regular cast is filled out with Veronica Carlson as Wallis, an intellectual secretary who wears hotpants and tanktops to the office, and Roger Lloyd-Pack as the cameraman whose idea of a chat-up line is to tell her, "Let's face it Wal, you've got a cracking pair of knockers but verbally you're a bit rough." This release is available exclusively from www.networkdvd.net. **Discs:** Originally made in colour, all but two of the episodes exist only as black-and-white telerecordings; these are at least, however, in pretty decent condition. (SA)

Treme: The Complete First Season

Blown Deadline Productions/HBO; US 2010; Warner Home Video/Blu-ray Region B; Certificate 15; 1,409 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: audio commentaries, 'The Making of Treme', 'Beyond Bourbon Street', text commentaries, interactive guides

Programme: In his latest 'novel for television', David Simon presents the faded, battered and beaten grandeur of a contemporary New Orleans, real and imagined, as a story of post-bellum

regeneration. Set three months after Hurricane Katrina in the eponymous neighbourhood, this ten-part serial opens with a 'second line' – a traditional New Orleans brass-band parade that lasts for hours and runs for miles, making several detours and pit stops as people swell its ranks along the route. It proves to be an imaginative delineation of this show's unhurried narrative trajectory, full of music and colour, real-life people and fictional creations rubbing shoulders, seemingly rudderless and chaotic and full of apparent wrong turns and unexplained pauses – until it reaches its destination in an emotionally wrenching funeral sequence in the concluding episode.

This is an unflinchingly funny and exquisitely crafted drama, its few false notes arising from the clichéd depictions of outsiders such as the snotty British journo, a wealthy Japanese jazz buff and clueless corn-fed Iowan tourists. But *Treme* is so confident and self-assured that it can disarm most criticism just by laying its cards on the table, as in the scene when John Goodman's troubled teacher tells his distracted English lit class not to "think in terms of a beginning and an end, because unlike some plot-driven entertainments there is no closure in real life". Amen to that.

Discs: The progressive HD transfer is pretty spectacular, offering pin-sharp images, vivid colours and deep blacks that are only occasionally marred by instances of digital noise and edge enhancement. The bounty of extras includes more than a dozen audio and text commentaries as well as a couple of fairly standard 'making of' talking-head documentaries. (SA)



BFI STILL POSTERS AND DESIGNS (C)

Brothers from another planet: Stephen Quay, left, and twin brother Timothy making their 1986 short 'Street of Crocodiles'

The key to the Quays

Michael Atkinson on a bold but doomed attempt to decode the work of the Quay Brothers

The Quay Brothers: Into a Metaphysical Playroom

By Suzanne Buchan, University of Minnesota Press, 308pp, £18.50, ISBN 9780816646593

Finally, the intoxicating and inexplicable corpus of the Quay Brothers has been seized upon – or fêted, depending on your perspective – by theory-soaked academia, namely Suzanne Buchan, director of the Animation Research Centre (animation research?) at the University for the Creative Arts, Farnham. This beautifully produced volume (with a welcome wedge of colour stills, snapshots, sketches and designs) is delightfully conflicted between theory's unfettered taxonomic impulse and the films themselves, which are (as Buchan notes more than once) uniquely resistant to exegesis of any kind. After all, with their distinctive blend of puppet animation and live action, they're closer to brain-probe-induced visions than texts. Should they be subjected to doctoral-thesis web-spinning at all?

Buchan doesn't shy away from the issue, noting extensively how evocation by association is the manner with which most critics (including myself, amply quoted) have discussed the Quays – filling the room with crowds of progenitors, from Starewicz, Borowczyk and Svankmajer to Tarkovsky, Freud, Kafka, Joyce, Robert Walser, Bruno

Schulz and Joseph Cornell – largely because there doesn't seem to be any other convenient point of access.

Buchan's strategy, necessarily scattershot though it is, searches far and wide for hermeneutical alliances, holding Quayness up to the bulbs of Gilles Deleuze's thoughts on Joyce's portmanteau words, Anthony Vidler's notion of the "architectural uncanny". Charles Reitz interpreting Marcuse on art and alienation, etc. Most interestingly, Buchan focuses on the Quays' manifestation of vitalism (the un-soul-imbued energy of matter), and of Schulz's dreamily articulated idea of the "generatio aequivoca", which he defined in 1934 in one of the stories in 'Street of Crocodiles' (the inspiration for the brothers' best-known film), as "a species of beings only half organic, a kind of pseudofauna and pseudoflora, the result of a fantastic fermentation of matter". It'd be tough to come up with a more concise evocation of a Quay film than that, and Buchan makes as compelling a case as the Quays have themselves over the years that their inspiration comes from early-century literary poetics at least as much as from the long history of Euro puppetry and animation.

This uncomfortable fit between so much thoughtful scholarship and the experiential mysteries of the Quays'

The Quays' quoted explanations are often hilariously obfuscatory

work only seems to make the films feel more sui generis, distinctively occupying a history-saturated sensibility and yet evasive of direct translations. Buchan also devotes a good deal of her book to biography – tracing the Quays' confrontations with cultural influences and their often difficult career negotiations with funders, producers and employers – and to their minute technical gambits, from the use of sound via their haunting employment of "unmotivated montage" to the manipulation of light. She works hard to excavate "meaning" in each of these procedural avenues, looking (for the most part) at their 1986 film 'Street of Crocodiles', arguably the only 20-minute short ever made that could sustain this much analysis. In this endeavour she receives only nominal help from the Quays themselves, whose quoted explanations are often hilariously obfuscatory and childishly simple in the same instant.

Design, of course, gets a heady chunk of attention too, as does the signifying thrust of animated puppets as filmed subjects. But in toto Buchan's book, for all its ambition and erudition, doesn't come to any confident conclusions – instead it seems to begin the conversation. Personally I'll rue the day when the Quays are boxed and codified in the post-Freud-Marx zoo like so many filmmakers have been, but I also doubt such a thing will ever come to pass – the work is too instinctive and personal. Buchan's book, in the meantime, functions as it should – it makes you want to re-view the oeuvre all over again.

Film Moments: Criticism, History, Theory

Edited by Tom Brown and James Walters, BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 178pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781844573356

Cinema began as the medium of moments. It is temporal by nature (by contrast, one can't speak of a 'moment' of a painting); and in its early years, technological limitations ensured that films usually concentrated on a single action: a train arriving at a station, workers leaving a factory. The 21st century has in a sense brought us full circle, with YouTube specialising in the momentary. This collection of new essays addresses the cinematic 'moment', focusing on small portions of films ranging from *Vertigo* (1958) through *Theorem* (1968) to *Team America World Police* (2004).

Some moments granted precise attention in these pages are of the peripheral sort: say the instant at which a visual point-of-view shot becomes a 'point-of-hearing' shot in *City Lights* (1931). Yet it's also striking that so many of the moments discussed are highly significant in dramatic turns. Nine essays analyse either beginnings or endings, and several focus on character introductions: eg Martin Shingler on Bette Davis's entrance in *Jezebel* (1938).

Yet even the most iconic of images can repay deeper contemplation, as demonstrated by Jonathan Frome's detailed investigation of how the chest-burster scene in *Alien* (1979) creates its surprise, or Douglas Pye's account of the seductive threat conveyed by Grace Kelly's first appearance in *Rear Window* (1954). Instead of treating close analysis as useful only for aesthetic or evaluative criticism, the book argues that sensitivity to textual detail is equally invaluable for film theory and film history – areas of film studies often accused of being less concerned with moments than with overviews.

There's always a risk, of course, of fetishising moments at the expense of exploring broader perspectives. But the fact is that every essay collected here unavoidably invokes a longer view – be it simply the rest of a film, or wider frames of reference (genres, directors' oeuvres, political contexts, etc). Ultimately, this collection never proposes the superiority of engaging with moments over contexts; rather, it demonstrates the importance of moments to any engagement with film, whatever the context.

✦ James McDowall



Seducer: Grace Kelly in 'Rear Window'

Avant-Garde to New Wave: Czechoslovak Cinema, Surrealism and the Sixties

By Jonathan L. Owen, Berghahn Books, 256pp, £50, ISBN 9780857451262

To anyone versed in the small but growing corpus of English-language appraisals of 20th-century Czech culture, Jonathan Owen's book feels both reassuringly familiar and pleasurable new. Its two main subjects, Czechoslovakia's rich avant-garde history across the 20th century and its more concentrated 1960s period of cinematic fecundity, have been explored elsewhere, but aside from studies of individual filmmakers such as Jan Svankmajer (a card-carrying Surrealist whose prolific output spans multiple media), there have been surprisingly few attempts at dovetailing both narratives in a comprehensive fashion.

Part of the problem has been a tendency in the West to recognise subversive tendencies in the New Wave films but to ascribe explicit political motives to them – whereas their creators were more concerned with undermining conventional ways of looking at the world. Although the films were often shunned (if not actively denounced) by representatives of the 'official' avant-garde, Owen finds overwhelming evidence of artistic common ground.

This is not especially surprising. Even mainstream-leaning directors such as Milos Forman worked in experimental theatre, and Jiří Menzel's fondness for adapting the novels of Bohumil Hrabal directly links his films to the post-war literary avant-garde. Menzel's frequent recourse to lower bodily functions also aligns his work to the 'base' tradition of Georges Bataille (perhaps to an unexpected extent for a filmmaker widely seen as a sweet-



In the tradition of Dada: Vera Chytilová's 'Daisies' (1966)

natured humanist). Owen is particularly alert to the eroticism underpinning scenes such as the famous set piece in *Closely Observed Trains* (*Ostre sledované vlaky*, 1966) in which a girl's buttocks are rubber-stamped – a scene that owes much of its effect to its calculatedly cross-contaminating collision of official formality and libidinous desire.

Menzel gets a chapter-length essay to himself, as do directors Vera Chytilová, Juraj Jakubisko, Jaromil Jires, Pavel Juráček and Jan Svankmajer. Key works are explored in depth, as well as critical responses to them: the chapter on

Chytilová's *Daisies* (*Sedmikrásky*, 1966) begins with a deconstruction of the director's own contentious (mis-) characterisation of her film as a "morality play", but defends the film against the Surrealist Vratislav Effenberger's charge that it amounts to no more than "decorative formalism" by arguing that Chytilová's frenzied assemblage of different aesthetic and cinematic modes ("a trampled-on salad") establishes her film in the tradition of both Dada and Brecht.

Similarly, Jires's *Valerie and her Week of Wonders* (*Valerie a týden divu*, 1970) –

an adaptation of a novel by Vítězslav Nezval, co-founder of the Czech Surrealist Group – has roots in everything from gothic melodrama (much beloved of the avant-garde) to pre-Surrealist Czech movements such as Devětsil and Poetism. Juráček's work, meanwhile, fuses the tradition of Kafka with elements of the then-dominant Theatre of the Absurd. The Jakubisko chapter doubles as a study of specifically Slovak avant-garde traditions, more closely tied to ancient folk customs than the work of their allegedly more 'sophisticated' Czech cousins.

Peter Hames's *The Czechoslovak New Wave* remains the first-choice guidebook to accompany exploratory delvings into 1960s Czech cinema, offering both a more comprehensive overview and more vivid descriptions of unfamiliar films. By contrast, Owen's dense analyses assume prior familiarity, though it helps that he favours titles that are easily available in Britain (the Juráček and Jakubisko films being the current exceptions).

But the book's considerable lasting value lies in the quality and depth of the contextual material, accompanied by a lengthy bibliography. Owen's potted history of Czech Surrealism, a movement quite distinct from its French counterpart (not least because of its deep roots in Czech soil), is a particularly valuable primer, as is his exploration of the peculiar historical, cultural and political conditions that allowed a surprisingly coherent film movement to spring into existence apparently spontaneously in the early 1960s, without any of the manifesto-driven fanfare that accompanied its counterparts elsewhere.

♦ Michael Brooke

Minding Movies: Observations on the Art, Craft, and Business of Filmmaking

By David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, University of Chicago Press, 292pp, £14.50, ISBN 9780226066998

Woe betide anyone who writes a textbook – or, more precisely, a successful textbook bought and used all over the world. For along with the advantages of such success comes an inevitable backlash: whatever the content of the book, and however well it fulfils its purpose, it comes to stand for the kind of grey orthodoxy that invites grumbling, rebellion and rejection.

David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson are the authors of the textbook *Film Art: An Introduction* (constantly updated), as well as a solid guide to global film history. *Film Art* is comprehensive and even-handed in its approach; it is neither polemical (as, for instance, Bordwell's *Making Meaning* certainly is) nor a statement of the pair's 'position'. But, through the odd logic of textbook resentment, all writings of Bordwell and Thompson have come in some quarters to represent a somewhat conservative status quo in

cinema studies. Projected on to them is a phantom 'power' over the field that is vastly overstated.

I too have felt – and publicly expressed – some misgivings about the emphases and exclusions frequently wielded by this powerhouse duo: their downplaying of interpretation (whether old-fashioned or newfangled) of a movie's meaning, or their rejection of almost any kind of cultural 'reflectionism' that tries to tie cinema into its socio-historical context. But, just like the turning point at the three-quarter mark of a typical film narrative (as Thompson outlines it so well in her *Storytelling in the New Hollywood*), the couple came up with an inspired move in the nick of time: they started a blog.

Minding Movies is a selection of pieces derived from *Observations on Film Art* (www.davidbordwell.net/blog), which has been running since September 2006. This is an intriguing gamble for a major university press to take, for it flies in the face of the given wisdom that people will not want to buy in print what they can read for free online (I hope this book

can help set a trend). *Minding Movies* comes in six clusters covering industrial matters, reflections on film criticism as an activity, storytelling and style, individual films, cinema understood as an art, and speculations on the medium's future.

Those who follow the blog – and it has many loyal fans around the world, myself included – won't find anything new here except an informative update/postscript at the end of each piece. And they may also regret some of the results of the culling necessary to form this selection: since international film-festival reports, for example, are off the table, the book skews itself towards the mainstream (*The Bourne Identity*, *Slumdog Millionaire*, *Babel*) and away from the diversity of world cinema.

It's the tone of the writing that's so striking here – and so different to some earlier works by this pair. As befits a blog, it's looser, funnier, more digressive and essayistic. Its authors are still thumping the same tubs (their exasperating preference for cognitive psychology over psychoanalysis, for

example), but even the most heated polemics have a friendlier air. And a dominant concern of their recent books – the emphasis on craft or practical problem-solving in filmmaking – finds a more natural expression in the frame-grab-friendly setting of the internet. (I have one for them to solve: how to stage a scene in which some characters sit while others stand? Directors including Sirk and Preminger made that challenge the cornerstone of their styles.)

Minding Movies pulls off a difficult trick supremely well. It is, in its gentle and entertaining way, a pedagogical book – one that often makes the case for internet writing as a new forum for teaching; but it is rarely stuffy or superior. Best of all, Bordwell and Thompson enjoy, as they put it, "debunking, zeroing in on conventional wisdom". They come up with striking, unexpected stances: blockbusters are good for the "economic welfare of the country as a whole"; and sequels are to be celebrated. If this is what cinephiles are today calling contrarianism, then I'm all for it. ♦ Adrian Martin

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Author of the auteur

Directorial authorship is a concept – alongside ‘national cinema’ – that no film scholar believes in theory, but many follow in practice. Nevertheless, Nick Roddick’s assertion (*S&S*, June) that *Cahiers du cinéma* and ‘lazy’ academics are to blame for widespread auteurism risks putting the cart before the horse. Assigning authorship to directors – an economical shorthand that continued the conventions of literary criticism and distinguished middle-class film publications from ‘common’ ones focusing on onscreen talent – has almost always been the default setting for *Sight & Sound*, which gushed about De Sica and Ray long before Truffaut and Rivette joined *Cahiers*. The latter’s ‘innovation’ – and the reason for suspicion of it among other publications at the time, including *S&S* – was less its methodology than its unequivocal taste for lowbrow American filmmakers, its ‘perverse cultivation of the meretricious’ (Lindsay Anderson, *S&S* 24, no. 2, 1954). If one examines the history, *S&S* is to blame for – if not the *politique* – then the *pratique* of auteurism.

Dr Mattias Frey

Lecturer in Film Studies, University of Kent

Multiplex complex

‘Forgotten Pleasures of the Multiplex’ (*S&S*, June) showed *S&S* doing what it does best: drawing attention to overlooked gems. I’d argue with the criteria of some critics – *Working Girl* was hardly ignored, nor was *Static* mainstream – but the article was impossible to read without adding personal choices. (I’d include *The Mist*, *Transsiberian* and *Agathe Cléry*.) For the last few years unloved multiplex fodder has awaited rediscovery at the lower end of the EPG or in DVD discount shops, but now that studios are opening their archives to produce on-demand DVDs, anyone wanting to see, say, Wilford Leach’s delirious *Pirates of Penzance* in a remastered widescreen print can do so.

Christopher Fowler

By email

Unnoticed:
‘Triangle’



LETTER OF THE MONTH

In praise of TV movies

In her review of *Third Star* (*S&S*, June), Kate Stables likens the film to a TV movie for its “maudlin streak and conventional melodramatic underpinnings”. But is this statement fair to the TV movie? I know that such productions are of generally inferior quality in the US, where the term is synonymous with low-budget, sentimental fare, but in Britain we have a rich history of quality one-off television: Leigh, Loach, Bennett, Clarke and Potter all spring immediately to mind. Plus in recent years Dominic Savage’s *Dive*, Oliver Hirschbiegel and Guy Hibbert’s *Five Minutes of Heaven* (right), John Alexander and Peter Harness’s *Frankie Howerd: Rather You Than Me*, Richard Laxton and Richard Cottan’s *Hancock & Joan*, Samantha Morton’s *The Unloved* and Andy De Emmony and Neil Cross’s



Whistle and I’ll Come to You were all, for me, of a quality rarely seen from British productions on the big screen.

So when you consider that this pejorative use of the term “TV movie”

was in the review of a British film by a British critic in a British magazine, it seems a little strange to me.

Iain Stott

By email

I presume the publication of a list of 75 films which had been commercially and/or critically buried was intended to provoke a reaction (*S&S*, June). The big surprise for me was that no one chose *Heaven’s Gate* (1980), a great *cause célèbre* in its time. How critical fashions change! Or is it that *S&S* contributors are too young to remember it?

Stephen J. Greenhill

Tonbridge

What a great issue the June edition was, from the joyous news of *Deep End* being rereleased, via Mike Hodges’s intelligent overview of *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion*, to the highlight of the issue: ‘Forgotten Pleasures of the Multiplex’. I instantly read through all 75 films, recognising many and devouring those I’d missed. It was fascinating reading, regardless of opinion and taste. If I may add my twopence worth to the list: Phil Joanou’s muscular *State of Grace* (check that cast list!); Frank Darabont’s *The Mist*; and Christopher Smith’s labyrinthine *Triangle*, which went almost unnoticed in the multiplexes and boasts a bravura performance from Melissa George.

Pete Moore

Brighton

You’re not turning into *Empire*, are you? Superficial, snarky, solipsistic, that is. I was bothered by the tone of entries in the multiplex piece (*S&S*, June), exemplified by the capsule review of *Excalibur*: “The sex scene where Arthur shags his wife on a table while still wearing his armour.” That’s actually Uther, Arthur’s dad, and it’s somebody else’s wife. But to make John Boorman, an important UK director of the last 40 years, sound like his career has been one of Russ Meyer-type exploitation – and the dismissive attitude of not rewatching or even looking at Wiki before writing the review – is what put me in mind of *Empire*’s laddish movie criticism.

Excalibur is hardly a movie you have to be drunk to enjoy. At any rate, you don’t expect *Sight & Sound* to think so.

Dave Morris

London SW12

Credits roll

As a freelancer in the UK film industry, I used to find your (already abbreviated) credits quite helpful – if only to keep track of what my colleagues were up to. I nevertheless think that reducing them to heads of department is a good idea for the magazine. The choice of who to include in your longer lists was already somewhat arbitrary, often with space for the obscure at the expense of more significant but perhaps quotidian roles (no focus pullers or boom operators, for example, both of whom have significant impact on how a film looks and sounds).

For what it’s worth, I’d like to make a few observations about the new credits. There seems to be confusion about location sound and post-production sound which, as with their image equivalents (DP and editor), are entirely separate entities. On *Age of Heroes*, for example (Reviews, *S&S*, June), the ‘Production Sound Mixer’ (location) is mentioned without any post-production credit, while for *Arthur* or *Attack the Block*, a few pages later in the same issue, the ‘Sound Designer’ (post) gets the single sound credit, without any mention of those who captured the sound in the first place. I’d accept that the various job titles are confusing (what is a ‘sound designer’, anyway?), but would like to push for location and post sound credits since – as with the pictures – having a single person in charge of sound is extremely unusual on any theatrically released feature.

Andrew Rowe

By email

While I can live with the reduced credits, there is one major omission. On numerous occasions, I can be watching

a film and a piece of music appears. This is not by the credited composer, but a piece from a commercial recording. It may be classical or a popular track. It niggles when you feel you know the piece. Help is at hand on arriving home and checking *Sight & Sound*. Please reconsider and reinstate the music section of the credits.

Peter Locke

Jarrow, Tyne and Wear

Editor’s note: Detailed music credits will continue to be published in ‘*Sight & Sound*’ for music documentaries and biopics.

Paper tiger

I agree entirely with the comments made by Christopher D.B. Shaw (Letters, *S&S*, May) in support of the continuing publication of *Sight & Sound* as a paper-based periodical. I fear that, if it became solely an online publication, the form would rapidly dictate the content, and there would be far fewer in-depth analytical articles and an increase in screen-sized bulletins or features. This should not be allowed to happen.

Pamela Weaver

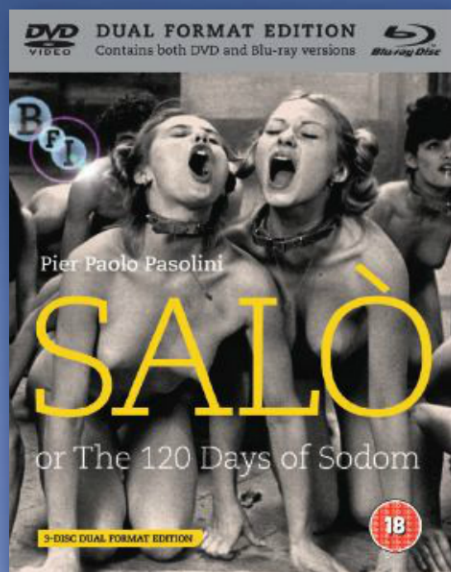
By email

Editor’s note: I would like to reassure readers that there are no plans to cease paper publication of ‘*Sight & Sound*’.

Additions & corrections

June p.61 *Everywhere & Nowhere*: Correct/ onscreen title is *Everywhere + Nowhere*, Cert 15, 96m 20s, 8,670 ft +0 frames; p.70 *The Messenger*, Cert 15, 112m 35s, 10,131 ft +15 frames; p.71 *My Dog Tulip*, Cert 12A, 81m 34s, 7,341 ft +3 frames; p.73 *Le quattro volte*, Cert U, 88m 18s, 7,947 ft +4 frames; p.75 *A Screaming Man*, Cert PG, 91m 10s, 8,205 ft +11 frames; p.78 *Third Star*, Cert 15, 92m 10s, 8,295 ft +0 frames; p.79 *The Veteran*, Cert 15, 98m 16s, 8,844 ft +0 frames
May p.55 *Cold Weather*, Cert 15, 96m 32s, 8,688 ft +0 frames; p.80 *Your Highness*: the writing credit should include Danny R. McBride (not McBride)
March p.74 *Son of Babylon* lead actor is Shehzad Hussien (not Shezad Hussien)

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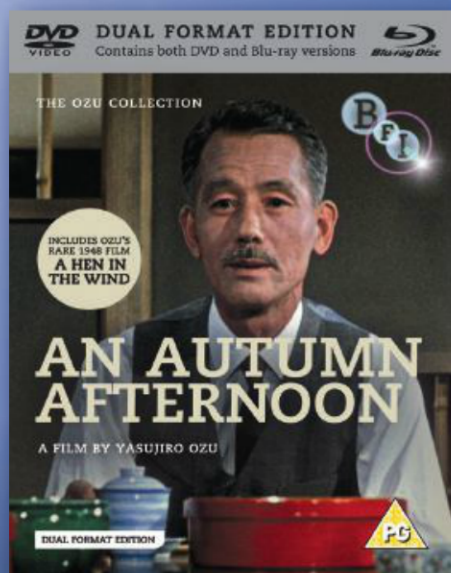
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